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THE LOWER NIGER AND ITS TRIBES





# THE LOWER NIGER AND ITS TRIBES

BY

MAJOR ARTHUR GLYN LEONARD

LATE 2ND BATT. EAST LANCASHIRE REGIMENT

AUTHOR OF 'THE CAMEL, ITS USES AND MANAGEMENT,' AND  
'HOW WE MADE RHODESIA'

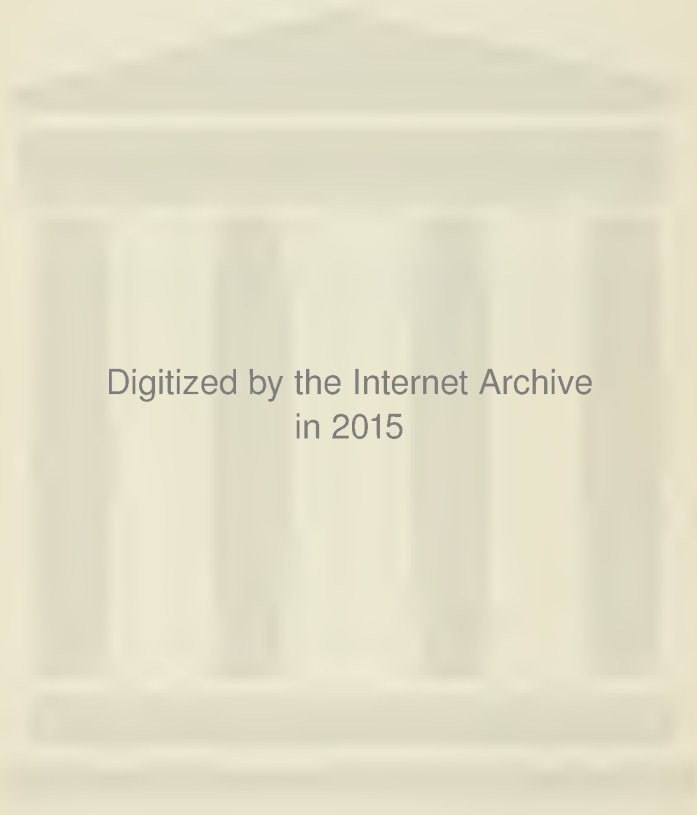
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## DEDICATION

To the Natives of Southern Nigeria in particular, and of West Africa in general, this Work is dedicated, in all true sincerity and sympathy, not only as a small memento of ten years' personal touch, but in the best and truest interests of themselves, and of Humanity, by one who has always endeavoured to labour on their behalf with the strenuous and untiring energy of a sincere and heartfelt sympathy.

Further, as one who voluntarily and unselfishly devoted some of the best years of her life in the same good cause, it is in all esteem and respect dedicated to the memory of Miss MARY KINGSLEY, and to the African Society that emanated therefrom, the object and motive of which is to advance the glorious cause of civilisation and progress.



## PREFACE

MAJOR A. G. LEONARD has all his life been deeply interested in comparative religion, and having paid especial attention to Aryan and Hindu mythology, as well as to natives of parts of Asia and Africa, he had prepared himself for the detailed study of a particular people. The opportunity came when he went to West Africa, and for ten years he patiently studied native life and thought, never losing a chance of getting into touch with the natives, even at the risk of his life, for some of the tribes he visited were not then amenable to British rule.

But knowledge acquired elsewhere and opportunity for research are of little avail unless an investigator be endowed with sympathy, the master-key that unlocks all hearts. An inevitable gulf separates the culture and thought of the black man from the culture and thought of the white man, nor is this lessened when the latter acts the part of ruler over the former, for then other considerations come into play, and misconception and prejudice accentuate the differences between barbarism and civilisation. From the first, Major Leonard determined to attempt, as far as in him lay, to remove this misconception, but there was only one way to accomplish this effectually, and that was to study the natives first hand and to endeavour to see everything from their point of view—in other words, to “think black,” as Miss Kingsley tersely put it. This is by no means easy to do, as it necessitates much physical hardship, prolonged patient inquiry, and an exercise

of tolerance towards weakness, crime, and brutality. Natives are extremely sensitive, and any exhibition of superciliousness or disgust causes them to be most reticent. For an observer to gain their confidence sufficiently to induce them to give expression to their inmost thoughts, their aspirations, and their sacred beliefs, it is necessary to have that charity that thinketh no evil. It should be remembered that it is by the merits of others that we are what we are, and if our forefathers had lived under conditions similar to those that obtain in the Niger delta, it is improbable that we would have been appreciably better than are the present inhabitants of that reeking district.

One great merit of Major Leonard's method of investigation is his appreciation of the fact that the social and religious expression of the Nature-folk is as much the direct result of their environment as is their material culture. No longer is it possible to dissociate religion from geography. Again and again he rightly insists that religion is a natural result of human evolution, having its ultimate sources in pre-human conditions. Religion originated as the response of the emotions and dawning intelligence of man to the world around and within him, and as in the past it served to satisfy certain human needs, so it has continued to do: sometimes widening, but at other times narrowing its scope; in some instances deepening its experience, in others becoming more and more superficial; occasionally it is stifled by convention and strangled by ritual, only to break away under the guidance of a reformer—the eternal conflict between the priest and the prophet. But the ebb and flow, periods of growth and resting stages, gradual evolution, and departure along new lines of emotion and interpretation, are all ultimately the outcome of the conditions of existence and the interactions of the human environment. Thus no phase of religious development can be understood apart from the social history of the people. The study of religion by itself is as barren

of real significance as is the study of animals formally arranged in a museum, or of plants in a herbarium.

Appreciating these facts, Major Leonard made it his business to consult at first hand the great book of nature as it is manifest in Southern Nigeria, and to see the people as they actually are, as they live, as they do, and as they think and speak. The more he looked, and the deeper he studied, the more evident it became to him that never has the European understood the Negro; and the present volume is his interpretation of Negro thought and expression.

Major Leonard draws a vivid picture of the wonderful Niger delta, and he traces its effects upon the mind and nature of its inhabitants,—a country of moisture, marsh, and malaria in the rainy season, but a land baked and parched, with shrivelled foliage, in the dry season; to this dramatic change between these contrasted seasons the author traces one of the manifold sources of the inherent dualism of native character and social life.

Colonel Ellis has proved in a masterly manner the gradual evolution that has taken place from west to east in the religion of the natives of the Guinea Coast, and with this is associated an analogous progress in the laws of descent and succession to property, and in the rise of government. He has also suggested that differences in the physical character of each country in question have played a great part in this progressive evolution. The conditions of existence in the Niger delta appear to be more similar to those that obtain in the country of the Tshi-speaking peoples than those of their more advanced neighbours to the east.

The environment of steamy tropical West Africa is very different from that of the dry steppes and scrub of Central Australia, so it is not surprising that there is a marked contrast in social life and religion between Negroes and Australians. The latter have to contend against a niggard earth, and, not being cultivators of the soil, they depend



entirely for their sustenance upon collecting and hunting; but even among these wandering hunters the religious sense is not lacking. The admirable investigations of Messrs. Spencer and Gillen have shown that these social savages have also developed a large number of ceremonies (which we term "magical") for the purpose of the increase of plant and animal life for human food or for the production of rain. Still greater is the difference between West African conditions and those obtaining in the arid deserts of Arizona and New Mexico, and as marked are the ways in which the religious impulse expresses itself among the Pueblo Indians; perhaps more clearly here than elsewhere is seen the direct influence of physical environment upon religion, where the numerous intricate ceremonies and the rich symbolism are all the expression of the urgent need for the vitalising rain.

Major Leonard also emphasises the close relation that exists between the social condition of the people and their religion. The Niger delta natives have simply transferred human conditions to the unseen world.

The main idea of the family centres in several grades of persons: (1) The Father or Fertiliser, who holds in his hand the power of life and death; (2) The Mother, who fills a position of great trust and reverence, as the nourisher and as the producer of the Eldest Son; (3) The Eldest Son, who has the confidence of both parents and is the mediator between them and the rest of the household; (4) The Elders of the various branches of the household, who are respected as being counsellors and heads of departments.

The evolution of the gods of a community is synchronous with the actual development and expansion of the community itself. The "primeval adoration of the father in the flesh," we are told, "combining, as it subsequently did, with a belief in the existence of the soul or spirit, developed first into the worship of the father in the spirit, and later on into that of certain deified ancestors, which, co-operating with a belief in

the phallic principle, eventually arrived at a worship of the Supreme God, from whom the origin of all life was traced." The god of each household or town is but the emblem of some former ancestor, and "it is from and through deified parents and personalities that the communal and departmental gods can be traced; it was through them that the god-idea arose, and in this way the origin of the human ancestors, connected and associated as they were with the gods, was traced back to the Supreme Generator or Creator."

The importance of the father, mother, and son in the human family has naturally led to the adoration of analogous family gods; thus there is recognised "the fatherhood of the governing and fertilising god; the motherhood of the producing and nourishing goddess, his co-operator and spouse; and the son, as the result of their co-operation." For example, among the Ibani, Adum was the father of all gods, who espoused Okoba, the principal goddess and mother of Eberebo, the son-god, a very intelligent, subtle, and brave deity, to whom children are dedicated, who thereby partake of his good qualities, and especially of his courage. In the Ju-Ju houses of every community in the delta the same trio are to be seen under their own local cognomens.

Of late years evidence has been accumulating to prove the spirituality of many savage and barbaric peoples. Because the outward symbolism is usually crude, the observer assumed that the ideas that lie behind it are equally elementary and ignoble. The investigator has frequently been ignorant or wrongly trained, almost invariably he has been prejudiced, rarely has he been sympathetic, and, as a consequence, the ideals and aspirations of natives have remained unknown, and, being unrecognised, their existence has been denied. But the more excellent way of certain investigators has demonstrated in this, as in so many other matters, that negative evidence is not evidence of negation; and we now know that our brethren most backward in material culture are imbued with ethical

and religious ideas which do not materially differ from those inculcated by the teachers of the religions of civilised peoples.

We learn that the religion of the Niger delta natives is based on the adoration of ancestral spirits, materially represented by emblems, the latter being nothing more nor less than convenient forms of embodiment which can be altered or transferred according to circumstances. These objects, rude and senseless as they may be, are regarded as vehicles of spiritual influence, as something sacred because of their direct association with some familiar and powerful spirit, and not as objects which in themselves have, or carry with them, any so-called supernatural powers. It is not the object itself, but what is in the object, that is the power for good or for evil. Hence, though they may venerate the object itself, they do so only because of the spirit which resides in or is associated with it. The object accordingly becomes nothing more nor less than a sacred receptacle, and its holiness is merely a question of association. The thing itself is helpless and powerless; it cannot do harm, just as it cannot do good; the spirit, which is invariably ancestral, even when deified, alone does the mischief and wreaks the vengeance in the case of neglect or impiety, or confers the benefits and the blessings when the ancestral rites are performed with due piety by the household. The insignificance of the object is of no consequence, nay, rather, the greater is its insignificance, the greater the reflected glory and power of the spirit. This is the essence of fetichism.

Worship consists mainly of homage and adoration. It is in the act, in the offering up of a substantial sacrifice, that the efficacy of propitiation lies. In native opinion prayer is of little avail, and what is said must be short and to the point—action is the only remedy. The following is given as a sample of their prayers: “Preserve our lives, O Spirit Father who hast gone before, and make thy house fruitful, so that we, thy children, shall increase, multiply, and so grow rich and

powerful." They act on the principle of, "Do unto your ancestors as you would they should do unto you."

Religion, even in a symbolical sense, is not a public or national affair, but entirely a personal and family matter, or, at most, communal. Usually priests act as go-betweens when the petitioners are supposed not to be on good terms with the spirits, since the former, as is their wont, have imposed upon the people their belief that their intervention is necessary to appease the offended spirits. On the other hand, all influential or powerful families dispense with priests, as in these cases the ancestral spirits possess a power that can make itself felt to some purpose, and the head of the house can appeal directly to the household manes.

The interrelation of mortals and spirits, deified or otherwise, is seen in the belief that, as human existence is dependent on the spiritual essence supplied by the gods, so the existence of the gods depends on the spirit of human and other sacrifices. Even the good spirit of a benevolent chief, unless he is propitiated by his people and pleased with their behaviour towards himself, is quite capable of not only neglecting, but actually of injuring their interests. As are men, so are gods.

A. C. HADDON.



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## INTRODUCTION

THIS work was undertaken eleven years ago with a twofold object. The first of these was to get the truth regarding the faith of their ancestors direct from the natives of Southern Nigeria themselves, and, in the second place, to place on record the truth as it was given to me by word of mouth and through personal contact with the people themselves. Whether or not I have carried out my original intention in its entirety, and whether I have fulfilled the trust which was reposed in me by those who appreciated the sincerity of my efforts, remains, of course, to be seen.

But in that deepest and inmost psychology, which aims at disclosing the internal consciousness of the ego, even the ostensible object must have its underlying motive. While not for a moment professing to be a Negrophile, nor yet again a philanthropist, I must admit that my sympathies for these despised and down-trodden people are of the very deepest and sincerest description. So that the principle which moved me and the sentiment that inspired me to action was one of sheer and simple sympathy for a race who, from the beginning until now, have had the misfortune to be tyrannised over by the inevitable and the inexorable in Nature, and who have never had even an opportunity of emerging from the grip of an environment that has arrested development and kept them in the same backward condition of their forefathers. To effect my object, however, it appeared to me that certain primary conditions were as imperative as they were essential, and these, needless to say, were truth and sincerity.

Qualified as I was at the outset, by virtue of a considerable and varied experience, which had been gathered in other parts of Africa and in the fervid East, it was quite evident to me, on my first contact with these natives of the Niger Delta, that they were altogether misunderstood by the European. Indeed, this knowledge, added to the abject slavishness of their position, was sufficient stimulus, apart from any personal sympathy, to spur my energies and increase my efforts to the utmost, in order to make them understood.

For if it is true, as it unquestionably is, that all the crime and misery in the world is fundamentally traceable to ignorance, it is equally true that misconception—its first-born—is also in a great measure responsible for a condition of vain and needless offence, therefore of injustice, that would never otherwise exist, were it not for the unmistakable fatherhood of a potential energy, which in the direction of evil—that is of an uneven balance—is greater even than the force of knowledge.

Working on these broad lines, which were based absolutely and entirely on the actual and personal experience of touch and action, the book, containing as it does, the religion, *i.e.* the philosophy of the people, is the result of a systematic course of investigation which extended over a period of ten years, in addition to the knowledge gained by my official work, which was arranged and organised on scientific principles, and conducted on the spot among the people. The people as they are, how they live, what they do and say, and how they do and say it—the book of Nature in fact—has been the only book which has been consulted by me. For even in those side issues or comparisons, which from the nature of the work are to some extent inevitable, and in which other people, authors, and books are referred to, the references made, although necessary, and in some few cases perhaps unavoidable, are merely casual and subsidiary, and in no sense essential to the real and true significance around which they have been centred and woven. Rather have they been made as the general result of a course of reading which has extended over twenty years, and which, although it is in relation to the subject, was not in any aspect

a deliberate or premeditated study of the peoples, authors, or books in question.

My methods of gaining information and of getting into sympathetic touch with the Delta natives may not have been, from an European standpoint at least, either conventional or constitutional, but they were in every sense natural, and, as the result I trust will demonstrate, most effective and satisfactory from the dual aspect of barbarism and civilisation.

For in dealing with a natural people with the object of gaining their confidence, so as to dive beneath the outer surface of their shrinking suspiciousness and timorous reserve, into the inner consciousness of their simple yet subtle existence, it is absolutely impossible to do so on the more highly organised and educated lines of any artificial system. But from the native or natural aspect my methods were strictly legitimate, and, what is more, appreciable, because sincere and sympathetic, and as being thoroughly and agreeably in accord with their own native laws and customs, which I had learnt, and, what is more, not been above learning from the people themselves. Reasonably and justifiably so, when the fact alone is taken into consideration, that in no locality in the world does circumstance alter the case more than it does in these torpid and enervating latitudes. So that in dealing with them every contingency had to be met, every fluctuation of opposing interests to be studied, every approach or loophole of offence and defence to be safeguarded, and every change, in fact, in the mental compass of their personal attitude, not merely provided for, but if possible anticipated. But, above all, remember it was my personal inclination, more than any ambition on my part, to master if possible the psychology of these natural people, so as to represent them to the world of civilisation in their own true colours.

But this natural method of administration was not my only method. This does not fully and comprehensively explain the secret of my success in getting, as I did, into so close a touch with these people. All through life I have possessed the power of living a life which was positively dual in existence, of having within my own entity the capacity of absolute detachment, from either internal or external surround-



ings, as the case might be. And it was this power that I utilised to its fullest extent when I was in contact with these sons of Nature, which enabled me to meet them, not merely more than half way, but, in reality, on their own ground or dunghill. For as their condition had from the very outset elicited my sympathy, I threw myself heart and soul into their cause; so much so that I became oblivious to outside matters, and came in time to look at their own customs from their own point of view. And in this way only is it possible for the European to understand the African; for if he thinks white and writes black, or *vice versa*, writes white and thinks black, the result attained is bound to be an abortion, or only a hybrid.

The fact of the matter is, that the civilised European has never been able to detach himself from his own very different intellectualities when studying the barbaric environment. Therefore in constituting himself a critic of barbaric methods, he has not in the true spirit of criticism been at all justified in doing so. For he has looked at the barbarian, or savage, from his own European standpoint, and in doing so has taken him much too literally, at the same time that he has not given these sons of Nature credit for the intelligence, the morality, and the knowledge which they in reality possess, quite forgetful of the fact that where religion is concerned they are naturally silent, and disinclined to part with any information. Because, in fact, his picture of them, based as it is on erroneous data and deductions, is altogether a misconception, inasmuch as it is drawn from a conception that is his own, and in no sense that of the people whom he is attempting to portray. So, unconsciously though it may be, he lends himself to the perpetration of an act of moral injustice, and in this conflicting way defeats his own good purpose in bringing the savage nearer to civilisation. Apart from all other moral considerations this is a serious blunder, for it goes without saying that where misunderstanding prevails between two human units that are unknown to and dissimilar to each other, in their moods and modes of thought, advancement, that is civilisation, is simply impossible. And the cause of this is most painfully apparent. To the ordinary

English official of mediocrity, possessing little or no individuality and a proportionate sense of responsibility, tied up, thwarted, and sealed as he is at every step by red tape, regulations, and sealing-wax, these natural methods do not commend themselves. So that confronted as he is by constantly varying circumstances and fluctuating conditions, which are new to him, with the unexpected, that is newer and stranger, thrown in every now and then, it is not in the least astonishing to find that as between the rulers and the ruled, except in rare and exceptional cases, there is no bond of sympathy whatever. And the fault of this, and I say so unhesitatingly, lies entirely with the Englishman himself, *i.e.* with his own unlovable personality, more so even than with his cold and calculating methods. An intense egoist, like the Hebrew of old, absorbed in himself and in his own surroundings, which savour principally of the money market, and his own island belongings, the Englishman is unsociable, not to say selfish. Charity—as regards the sentiments and sympathies of feeling—begins at home with him. His own personal affairs first of all demand his own individual attention, and outside affairs, except in so far as they touch upon his own, come next, and are seen to, on this principle only, and in no sense as possessing any individuality or personal interest of their own.

Ordinarily calm, deliberate, and even-minded, he differentiates between extremes, religion excepted, and arrives at a correct balance or adjustment of them, dispensing justice accordingly with an even hand. But living in a state of constant suppression of the emotions, as Englishmen for centuries have done, what was formerly an education has developed into a tendency, and the modern Englishman is a human machine of suppressed emotions, devoid of outside sympathy, yet believing in the mission of his race, although forgetful of the fact that the greater the race the greater the faults, presumably as well as comparatively.

Thus it is that in administering the negroid races he views matters from his own very exalted yet peculiarly insular standpoint, and judges them by his own immaculate standard. Looking at the question from the deepest sense of imperialism, the Mission, it seems to me, if conducted on these lines,

can never be the success it ought otherwise to be were it administered on a policy of sympathy, with a rational base. There is, in fact, but one road that in dealing with the Oriental or African leads to success, and that road lies first of all through their own ancestral religion and customs, and then through the heart. For rationalism, although it subordinates the emotions to reason, is full of human sympathies of the very highest and most intellectual order.

As an educated and one of the best informed Frenchmen of his time, Monsieur Emile Boutmy, in a study of the political psychology of the English people, says: "The Englishman is less social than men of any other nationality. I mean that he is less conscious of the ties which bind humanity together, his moral formation owes little to his relations with other men, he scarcely troubles himself about what they think, and if he ever considers the matter at all, it makes no difference in his sentiments and actions. In short, the Englishman is, to a large extent, a recluse; he is more aloof from the world in which he lives and the neighbours whom he elbows than the men of any other nation."

This analysis of Mr. Boutmy's explains the situation most explicitly and comprehensively, for the Englishman's peculiarly unsociable and unhappy egoism, due, as it has mainly been, to the insularity of his environment, also to the possibilities and potentialities of his position, is entirely responsible for the existence of that most indispensable deficit of which we have been speaking. But for the present, at all events, enough has been said on this very deplorable and unfortunate circumstance. To conclude, however, not only am I personally and avowedly in sympathy with my subject, but it has been my sincere and strenuous endeavour, in writing these pages, to put the reader in sympathy with it also. But no effort on my part can effect this unless he himself approaches it from that most Catholic standpoint of all, which sees the good and not only the evil that is in everything, that tolerant standpoint which sees eye to eye, and soul to soul, *i.e.* without bias and partiality, but with sympathy as well as reason, and which recognises in barbarism a lower and undeveloped phase of natural evolution, with the same human instincts as those of civilisation, but in

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no sense a condition of Nature outside or apart from it,—the standpoint, in fact, of the true and sincere humanitarian, who would work to diminish the evils and miseries of those unfortunate sections of humanity which have never had the opportunity to enable them to rise to the sublimer heights that have been attained by the greater expansion and development of civilisation.



SECTION I

PART I

A GEOGRAPHICAL AND TRADITIONAL  
OUTLINE



## CHAPTER I

### A DESCRIPTION OF THE PHYSICAL FEATURES OF THE COUNTRY

BEFORE attempting in any way to arrive at a conclusion, or, speaking more accurately, in the absence of all history to formulate a theory regarding the origin of a medley of tribes so singularly alike in their sociology, yet differing from each other in language and dialect, it is my intention to deal first of all with a geographical description of the whole country, then with the tribes inhabiting the various divisions, and lastly with the local traditions, which unfortunately are not only meagre but more or less confused, therefore, to a great extent, unreliable.

The tract of country now known as Southern Nigeria is a delta, formed by the historic river which, rising behind Sierra Leone, flows in a course so erratic as to have baffled the curiosity and the skill of the keenest geographers, ancient and modern.

Taking the Lower Niger, from its junction with the Benue at Lokoja, as the handle of a huge gridiron, the body would be represented by the countless streams and creeks which radiate from the main river at a point some 200 miles below the confluence and 120 miles from the sea. At this point the river bifurcates into its two principal branches, the one to the east, which empties itself over a shallow bar at Akassa, being called the Nun, and the western branch, that joins the Warri stream, below Burutu, and enters the sea as the Forcados, being known as the Gana-Gana.

The actual depth of the body of the grid is 120 miles,



with a width at its widest part of not more than 270 miles, and a length of handle of 200 miles.

Delimited, however, as Nigeria has been by the British Government into two great divisions, the north and the south, with an utter disregard of racial and political considerations, the northern limit of the latter ends at Idah, curtailing the length by some 60 miles.

In a total coast-line of 330 miles there are some nineteen rivers—the Benin and the Escravos to the west of the Forcados; the Ramos, Dodo, Pennington, and Middleton between it and the Nun; between this and the Cross river the Brass, St. Nicholas, St. Barbara, St. Bartholomew, Sombrero, New Calabar, Bonny, Andoni, Opobo, and Kwa Ibo rivers; and to the east of the Cross river and running into it, below Duke Town, are the Old Calabar, the Kwa, the Akpayafe, and the Ofa or Ndiani rivers. Between the Kwa Ibo and Benin river there is a connection right through by creek, which extends in reality from the latter right into the lagoon at Lagos, the creeks, however, being small and much obstructed by snags and vegetable growths.

The Cross river and its affluents are altogether distinct, forming, as they do, a small and separate delta. The Benin, Opobo or Imo, and Kwa Ibo rivers, although connected with the Niger, are also quite separate streams, and the two latter, which either rise from the same source or very close to one another, I have myself traced up to the near vicinity of Bende.

Out of all these rivers, however, only the Forcados, Bonny, and Cross rivers are navigable for large, ocean-going steamers, although vessels with a shallower draught trade regularly in the Nun, Brass, Opobo, Benin, and New Calabar rivers by side creeks. In all of these, factories, belonging principally to the African Association and Miller Bros. & Co., are established at Duke Town and Creek Town in the Old Calabar district; at Eket on the Kwa Ibo river; at Opobo and Egwanga in the Opobo district; at Bonny in the district bearing that name; at Bakana, Bugama, and Abonama in the Degama or New Calabar district; at Brass on the Brass river; at Akassa on the Nun; at Burutu on the Forcados; at Warri on the Warri

river, at the mouth of the Benin river, and at Sapele, 50 miles higher up; while the Niger Company have factories all the way up the Niger, from Burutu and Akassa, right on into Northern Nigeria.

Guarding the entrance to each river is the inevitable sandbar, which decides irrevocably the utility or otherwise of the streams over which it presides, like an evil genius, and in every instance where the decision has been favourable, flourishing towns belonging to the middleman, *i.e.* those who trade between the white traders and the native producers, and extensive, well-stocked factories which carry on an excellent trade, chiefly in palm oil and kernels, in English goods—chiefly gin, tobacco, cottons, hardware,—are an absolute certainty.

But as it is not in this direction that the interest of this work lies, I will now proceed to give as good a description as I can of what the country in general is like, so that the reader may form a tolerably accurate idea of the environment by which the people are surrounded, in order to enable him to arrive at a still more faithful conception of their ordinary characteristics, as well as of their special idiosyncrasies.

Let the reader imagine a network of waterways, a huge web of mud and water, shaded by the stately but never-changing evergreen mangrove, through which the muddy waters of the Niger, like a main artery, flow, with a swish and a swirl, over the treacherous sandbars into the foam-covered breakers of the grey Atlantic.

But it is not possible for any picture, whether drawn by the hand or conjured by the mind, to portray the painful monotony of the mangrove which Nature has smirched in her dullest green, the muddy dinginess of the grey-brown turgid waters, the foetid evil-smelling swamps of slime and ooze, reeking with malaria and with a life that is repulsive, and strangely suggestive of its surroundings:—the loathsome churchyard crabs, recalling hideous memories; the slimy mud-fish, linking the prehistoric past with the ever-advancing present; the crafty crocodiles sunning themselves on snags and sandbanks, the huge, ungainly hippos, the hideous iguanas, and the gorgeously painted pythons lurking in the forests for

unwary victims; the presuming mangrove flies, who have the audacity to deposit their larvæ beneath the human skin, the pestilential sand-flies, and the equally pestiferous mosquitoes, the harmless culex and the much-discussed anopheles, with their fever germs—all of them much too ubiquitous; and last of all the organ-grinding crickets and the musical frogs, whose chorus at nights, when the bush is lit up by the fireflies in their myriads, adds to the liveliness and gives a distinct solidity to the hum of the insect life which simply teems all round one.

These, which are some of the living realities of the Delta, are as a rule to be seen, and without fail to be felt, but regarding the picturesqueness of the one and the intensity of the other, I must again refer to the imagination; but even those readers who possess unusually daring and fertile powers will fail to realise them as they actually exist.

This mangrove swamp, however, is merely a belt, averaging 30 miles in width from the sea inland, and extending from one extremity of the Protectorate to the other; but even within this belt are numerous tracts of good but low-lying land. At this point inland the mangrove disappears altogether, and the waterways are defined by low banks of solid ground, draped in the luxuriant foliage of various tints and graced by splendid trees of different kinds.

Prominent among other varieties, and nearly always denoting the presence of farms and towns, are the plantains and palms—"oil" and "wine" chiefly,—the towering cotton tree, the African oak, iroko, sasswood, mahogany, and a kind of teak, which, with their different shades of green and the occasional colouring of certain flowers—the bright red of the cotton trees, a crimson blossom like that of mountain ash, and the ordinary convolvulus being among the commonest,—blend into a beautiful harmony.

From this point, too, the mainland virtually commences, and as one walks away from the Niger into the interior, either to east or west, it rises very gradually and with a gentle slope up to an elevation of about 200', that covers a width of some 70 miles. Then the country assumes a broken and undulating aspect, which in the locality of Bende, to the east, and Uromi,

westward, swells into hills that north of Idah rise to the dignity of mountains.

Looking at Southern Nigeria from a purely geographical standpoint, it is naturally divided by the Niger into two distinct sections, the eastern and the western.

Both these divisions, as far as can be estimated, are populous, while the country, a very considerable area of which I have walked over, is, as I will point out later on, undoubtedly rich in natural and economic products. It is well intersected by numerous rivers and streams in the eastern division, flowing either towards and into the Cross river or the Niger, and in the western running to east and west in the same way—a more or less practical demonstration of the existence of a watershed midway in each division.

Most of these streams are fringed by swamps on both banks, varying in width from a hundred yards to a mile, according to the size of the stream.

From whatever point of view it may be looked at, whether from the practical standard of navigation or from the less useful but more ornamental one of artistic effect, the Niger, to be understood and appreciated, must be seen in two distinct phases, which it has to undergo within the year: during the dry season, for instance, when the river is at its lowest and sandbanks and islands appear everywhere, making the navigation ever so much more intricate and difficult; and in the rainy season, when it is at its highest, rising from 40' to 60' in different localities, until it overflows its banks below Onitsha, where the country on both sides is flat.

These inundations, according to native reckoning—in other words, experience,—are unusually high every seventh year. Then the riverside towns are swamped, and the people sit on raised platforms inside their huts, paddling from one to the other in canoes, and in no way annoyed by the vagaries or rude attentions of the river god. For they are essentially fatalists, believing firmly in the principle that the evil which cannot be prevented or cured has to be endured with patience, and as their ancestors lived on the river bank and faced the swollen floods, they feel bound to do the same thing. So they are patient to a degree, neither thwarting nor offending the



demons of the devastating waters, although in the interior the people invariably desert their homes when smitten by disease.

But if the river, averaging 1000 yards in width—a width that in places increases to 2000 yards and over,—is, from a spectacular aspect, an interesting sight in the dry season; with its grass-clad islands and banks, it is most certainly a splendid spectacle in the rains, as it rushes down from Lokoja to Onitsha, a mighty muddy torrent, so far kept in bounds by the greater elevation of the country; but below this point pouring over the unprotected banks, and spreading itself all over the low-lying swamps and into the countless creeks of its still lower delta. A scene in every way worth seeing, although, when considered from the practical standpoint of utility, it is sad to see so much power and so many possibilities running year by year to sheer waste.

The villages and towns, all throughout the whole Protectorate, are very numerous, while isolated homesteads are unknown, except occasionally, on farms and plantations; but there are no cities of any great size or importance, certainly not one that can be compared to Ilorin or Abeokuto in the country behind Lagos, or to Bida, Sokoto, and Kano in Northern Nigeria; for even Benin city, previous to its capture, was neither extensive nor populous, and certainly of no importance from either a civilised or architectural standpoint.

## CHAPTER II

### A CLASSIFICATION OF THE PRINCIPAL TRIBES

It will be absolutely impossible for me, so numerous are the tribes and clans in Southern Nigeria, to do more than describe the largest and most important.

Going from east to west, and beginning with the Old Calabar district, we have the Efik, an offshoot of the Ibibio, who occupy the country from the mouth of the Cross river 60 miles up to Itu, with Duke Town their capital and the headquarters of the Southern Nigerian Administration, a large and prosperous town of over 20,000 inhabitants.

To the east of Old Calabar are the Akwa, generally known as Kwa, living on the Akwa and Akpayafe rivers; to the north-east are the Ekoi, practically the same as the Akwa; northward, on the east bank of the Cross river, are the Uwet, Okoyong, and Umon tribes; while on the east bank, above Itu, are various sections of the Ibo race, chief of whom are the Aro, who were until quite recently so celebrated for having in their possession the great and supreme divinity of the universe.

Between the Cross and Opobo rivers, to a distance of 60 miles from the coast, is the Ibibio country; while at the mouth of the Kwa Ibo river are the Ibeno, a miserable mixture of the Ibibio and the Efik; and along the coast, up to the Opobo river, are a few more Kwa settlements.

At Opobo is a colony of the Bonny or Ibani<sup>1</sup> people, who many years ago left Bonny and settled there. The town, con-

<sup>1</sup> The vowel U is more frequently used than not in the use of this word Ibani, but either vowel can be used.

taining some 15,000 inhabitants, is on the right bank of the river, two miles from the bar; and the people, who are keen traders, trade in all the Ibo and Ibibio markets, some 60 miles up the Opobo and Kwa Ibo rivers.

From Opobo to Bonny, along the coast, are the Andoni, a small tribe of fishermen said to be connected with the Kwa; and between them and the Ibo to the north, another small tribe called Ogoni are wedged in.

Bonny, corrupted from Ibani, is a town on an island at the mouth of its own river; but its glory and trade have long since departed, although, with the exception of the Cross river, it forms, after Forcados, quite the best and safest harbour in the Protectorate.

Twenty-five miles up the Bonny river is a small tract of country inhabited by the Okrika, one half of whom are fishermen and the other half traders.

To the north-west of them is the habitat of the New Calabar people, a pushing and a progressive tribe, who have their principal town at Abonama, 30 miles from the mouth of the Sombrero river; north-west of the New Calabar district, up the Engenni or Oratshi river, are the Abua and Ekpafia.

Westward of Bonny live the Brassmen, fine traders, whose chief town, Nembe, is also situated at a distance of 30 miles from the sea.

North of Nembe, and between it and the Engenni, also towards the Niger, a small tribe called the Ogbayan are settled.

The Oru occupy the tract of country on each side of the Nun branch of the Niger, and along the coastline between it and the Ramos river.

Then, in the triangle formed by the Nun and Gana-Gana, also outside it, to a small extent, both eastward and westward, dwell the Ijo, the most important tribe in the lower Delta, and indeed, after the Ibo, in the whole of Southern Nigeria.

On the Warri and Benin rivers we find the Jekri middlemen, who are not only the most intelligent and tractable, but quite the best mannered of all the tribes.

To the north of the Jekri are the Sobo, and to the eastward are the Igabo—shy and timid, no doubt, but treacherous

and rude; while to the west are the Bini, belonging to what was once the ancient and powerful kingdom of Ubini or Bini, *i.e.* Benin.

Proceeding up the main river, we find at first a mixture of Ijo, Igabo, and Ibo, as far as Abo, *i.e.* about 135 miles from the sea, and from this point pure Ibo up to Asaba; then a mixture on the east bank of Ibo and Bini as far as Illushi, or at least from where the Kukuruku country commences, and on the west bank up to the boundary of the Igara or Igala, who at one time owned a large and extensive kingdom, which has recently, however, very much dwindled both in size and importance.

But as this work principally concerns only the Ibo and other tribes already mentioned, further detail regarding any of the more northern tribes, such as the Kukuruku, will be quite unnecessary.

Lastly, but first in importance—not only numerically, but politically—are the Igbo or Ibo, occupying the heart of Southern Nigeria, *i.e.* the country between the Niger and Cross rivers, extending to the south within 60 miles of the seaboard, and to the north along the Cross river as far as the sixth parallel of latitude and up to the seventh degree in the direction of the Niger. Going westward, and crossing over the Niger from Abo on the right bank up to and beyond Asaba, we find the Ibo in occupation of a narrow strip of country that is bordered on the west by the Igabo and Sobo country, and on the north by the Kukuruku; and although it is difficult to speak with any certainty, I think it more than probable that some of the tribes to the east of the Cross river are merely sections of the Ibo race, or are at all events of Ibo origin.



## CHAPTER III

### TRADITIONS

AMONG a people whose intelligence has not risen to the height of caligraphy, it is needless to say that no record, therefore no history, exists; while even tradition, relying solely on the mental effort of memory, is but a meagre and at times a not too reliable record of the past—a past that as a rule, except in the case of some very special event, such for instance as a migration from one locality to another or the invasion and occupation of territory belonging to a different tribe, does not go back for more than fifteen to twenty generations, or from three to four hundred years at the most.

This, at all events, is the position of affairs as they exist in the Niger Delta, and is not to be attributed so much to the difficulty of obtaining information as to the fact that the old, old traditions have long, long ago been forgotten.

It is not in the least surprising, therefore, that there is an utter absence of all mythology amongst these natives, so that, with the exception of the myth relative to the creation of the two primary brothers, the elder of whom was black and the younger white, which is more or less common to all negroid tribes (*vide* Section III.), there are no others—certainly none that it was my good fortune to hear of. Yet in their folklore, or rather beast fables, which deal principally, almost entirely, with the animal world, and also in their deities, it is possible to trace the sole surviving relic of a very ancient mythology.

Commencing with the Efik, now officially and commercially known as the Old Calabar people, it appears that in the early

part of the eighteenth century they were a community of the Ibibio tribe, living close to but on the west side of the Cross river. Driven by the other Ibibio, or because of local pressure of some kind, they abandoned their old homesteads, and crossing over the Cross and Old Calabar rivers, established a new settlement on the east bank of the latter river. A few years later a further division took place, and the "Eyo" portion of the community, attracted by the slave trade that was then being carried on by European vessels, descended the river and founded Ikorri-tungo, now known as Creek Town, from its position on a creek which runs off the main stream.

But amid the wealth and prosperity which trade brought the canker of dissension soon arose, so that after much bickering and strife, which resulted in an open quarrel, the weaker party, consisting of several households, were expelled, and proceeding only a few miles farther down the main river they settled at Obuton or Old Town. The immense advantage of this position, cutting off the Creek Town community as it did from the European shipping, soon made itself apparent. But the latter, stronger as they were, were not to be outdone. A colony was soon established by them on the eastern bank of the river, a couple of miles below Obuton, on the slope of the rising ground that falls away into the belt of mangrove swamp to the south of it.

The site so admirably chosen, named Akwa-Akpa, *i.e.* "New Town," now called Duke Town or Old Calabar, was so advantageous in every way, absolutely commanding as it did that portion of the river which the European vessels selected for anchorage, that it succeeded in attracting many families who took up their residence there, so much so that in a few years' time Akwa-Akpa had grown more extensive and powerful than either Creek Town or Obuton.

Thus the people of this latter place, now quite hemmed in, found it difficult to go either up or down the river in any safety; but, making a gallant struggle for existence, they held their own for years, until one day treachery laid them low. Invited on some occasion to a friendly conference on board an English ship, the chiefs of New Town waylaid and massacred

them, and in this way they secured practically the whole of the foreign trade.

Under Efum, in the beginning of the eighteenth century, New Town was pre-eminently prosperous. A strong personality and a powerful ruler, he made his power felt both up and down the river, and as far as to its mouth in the latter direction. Further than this, he enacted laws by which the persons and ships of white men were rendered secure in the country under penalty of death. Yet, fearing aggression from the white men, he guarded strictly against their establishing factories or settlements of any kind on shore.

It was this same Efum, christened Duke Ephraim by one of the masters of the English vessels, who gave to the town its present name.

There is little more to tell, except that as Duke Town grew in importance Creek Town diminished, and that while prior to the British administration of the country the latter had as rulers eight kings—all of the house of Eyo Honesty—the former has had several Duke Ephraims and an Eyamba or two.

Passing over the Akwa and the Ibibio, a wild and truculent race about whom nothing is known and from whom it was impossible to obtain any information, it is possible among the Bonny and Opobo people—the original Ibani—to go back even farther than in the case of the Efik, to about three or four hundred years.

There seems to be some difference of opinion, however, as to their origin. One tradition of the elders is that the Ibani are derived from the Ngwa section of the Ibo race, one Alagba-n-ye, a hunter, having, it is said, come down the Azumini Creek on a hunting expedition, and settled finally with his family on Breaker Island—not the one now in existence, but another that lay more towards the eastern side of the river, beyond Ju Ju Town Creek. The original name given to the first settlement, which was only a small town, was Okuloma (called Okuloba by the Brassmen), so christened after the “okulo” or curlews who inhabited the island in large numbers. Another version has it that the original Ibo settler was one Opobo or Ogulu, who intermarried with a woman from a

country to the west of New Calabar; but as this could only have occurred about 140 years ago it is much too recent, considering the fact that since the sixteenth century down to 1832 Bonny was in reality probably the greatest slave mart of West Africa. Barbot, in his *Voyage to New Calabar*, 1699, speaks of it as Culebo, and of the king and his brother Pepprell, evidently referring to Perekule, who afterwards was called King Pepper, or Pepple, because of his trading in this article with the Europeans.

Yet strangely enough, according to my informants, there is one point on which the Bonny people seem to be fairly well agreed, and that is the relationship existing between themselves and the Brassmen. According to this tradition, they have at all events always been on the very closest terms of friendship with and have never made war on each other; and this they attribute to the fact that their gods are in some remote ancestral or spiritual way derived from the same stock—Ogidiga, the Brass, and Ekiba, the Bonny god, having been somehow related in spiritland.

Both these deities, so the old people say, were gods of war who a long time ago mutually arranged to go out into the world, each one to choose a separate country for himself, for the purpose of creating war; so they parted, and it happened that Ogidiga went to Brass and Ekiba to Bonny.

The real fact of the matter, however, after a careful analysis of all the facts, is that the connection was originally one of blood brotherhood, which was no doubt cemented all the closer by marriage ties. Still, it is of course possible that some of the original Bini following of Alepe may have left Nembe and thrown in their lot with the Ibani, and this idea is to some extent supported by the fact that even at the beginning of the nineteenth century the latter acknowledged the suzerainty of the King of Benin, and despatched envoys to that city annually to tender their allegiance to him; although, of course, it is quite possible that the tribute in question was one of religious supremacy and not of heredity.

Leaving this for future comment, an examination of the pedigree of the Ibani royal family (*vide* p. 47) is tolerably strong evidence in favour of the assertion that Alagba-n-ye



was its rightful founder; but, as we shall see later on, another foreign element must have been introduced.

Beyond the fact of the division which occurred, that ended in the separation of Opobo from Bonny, there is nothing of any further interest in the Ibani traditions. This separation occurred as follows:—

After King Perekule's death, his sons Foubra and Opobo reigned together. As the former, who was the elder, died without leaving a son, the head slave Ibmani took charge of the house. At the time Bonny happened to be at war with New Calabar, Okrika, and Andoni. Taking each in turn, commencing with the latter, Opobo subdued them all, and not long after he followed his brother into the land of shadows, leaving behind him an only son, Dappa by name. This youth, being a minor at the time, was, in accordance with the laws of the country, placed under the authority of Mmadu, who, although a slave, was, as in the case of Ibmani, also placed in charge of the household.

The fact that two slaves were at the head of affairs seemed to a certain extent to have displeased the other chiefs, and, a disagreement having taken place over some question of domestic economy, Mmadu withdrew the whole of his late master's household eastward across the Andoni flats to the Imo river, where he founded the settlement now known as Opobo.

All the Okrika know, or will tell of themselves, is that their forefathers originally came to Okrika from Afam, a place beyond Obu-akpu in the interior Ibo country, which points to, if it does not determine, an Ibo origin; and the fact of their close contact with the Ibani on one side, and to a lesser degree with the New Calabar on the other, at once accounts for their dialect being affiliated to both of these as well as to the Ijo.

Of the Ogoni, all that my agents and myself were able to find out was that one Ogbe-saku, who was the first founder and king, lived in a town called Joko, which is situated in about the centre of the southern half of the country. By this ruler the latter was divided into four sections or districts, which were named after the principal towns, viz. Joko,

We-o, Bewa, and Boam; the first of these being the capital of the N'galabia Ogoni, the second of the Gogara branch, the third of the Bewa, and the fourth of the Boam; the people of the last-mentioned locality being derived from Joko, while those of the We-o and Bewa are related. Including the chief towns, there are some seventeen communities in all; but of the northern portion I was unfortunately unable to get any further information beyond the fact that the Ogoni are considered by the Ibani to be treacherous and excitable, and, in these respects especially, similar to the Ibibio in temperament and character. Unlike them, however, they are bad farmers and traders, and have the reputation of being the dirtiest people as well as the greatest cannibals in the Delta.

With regard to New Calabar, tradition is not only meagre but again at variance, and it is difficult at first either to reconcile or account for the differences except from the broad basis of tribal union or mingled origins.

One version maintains that the New Calabar people are an offshoot of the Efik from Old Calabar, from whom they divided themselves because of civil war. Driven out of their town, they took refuge, it is said, in the Ibo country, and were conducted by some Aro down to the locality lying between Isokpo Market and Bugama.

Here it was that, during one of their fishing excursions towards the sea, they fell in with a Portuguese ship at the entrance of the channel now known as the New Calabar river. The captain of the vessel having made an offer to trade with them, they were so pleased at the idea that they left Isokpo and formed a settlement on the right bank of the river close to its mouth, which resulted in a large slave trade being carried on between them and the Portuguese or Spaniards.

According to the New Calabar section, who now live at Bakana, a portion of their tribe at all events originated from the Ijo; and the tradition is that formerly when the people of a town or community went hunting it was customary to make an equal division of all the game that had been killed. On one occasion, however, the division appears to have been carried out unequally, or at all events in such a way as to

have caused serious dissension—so much so, in fact, that the community in question split up into at least three sections, one migrating to Brass, another to Okrika and Bonny, and the third combining with the original or at least the then existing inhabitants of New Calabar and Kulu.

There is something more substantial to go upon concerning Brass. Here one tradition is that a man, by name Alepe, presumably a chief, and a Bini, of Benin City, left there to go on a fishing tour accompanied by his family, and after roving about the creeks and rivers of that part of the Delta lying between the Benin and Brass rivers, he settled down on the small tract of land now known as Nembe, but formerly called Alepe after its founder.

Another, and evidently a more reliable version, states that a long time ago there was a great king of Benin who sent his people to war. His eldest son, anxious to go, requested that he might be allowed to join the expedition, but was refused. In spite of this, however, the son managed to get away from Benin, attached himself to the force, and, as it appeared, was the first man killed after the fighting had begun. Fearing the consequences would be disastrous to themselves, a general consultation was held among the leaders of the expedition, and at the suggestion of Alepe, the commander, it was agreed that the whole party should migrate to other parts and found a place for themselves, which was immediately acted upon; and there can be little doubt that in choosing the site they did so because of the security of its position. In support of this tradition it is well known that formerly, and indeed until quite recently, it was customary on the death of the Bini king for certain of the Brass notables to be present in Benin City to vote in the election of the new king as well as to take part in the coronation ceremonies.

Here, in course of time, Alepe was joined by a certain number of people from Ekulema in the New Calabar district, a place that, according to the tradition of the families who originally came from there, is also referred to as having supplied the original inhabitants of the present Brass.

Subsequent to this a further reinforcement was received in the form of a band of Ijo from Obiama. Pirates and



desperadoes of the very worst description, these people had been the scourge of the whole neighbourhood in which they had lived, and the inhabitants, no longer able to tolerate their depredations, had combined and driven them out of their town.

This is one account; but another version, naturally enough from those who have descended from the Obiama section, maintains that the real cause or origin of the war was a quarrel over some venison. This tradition, however, is common to so many localities, particularly in this portion of the Delta, that it makes the unravelling of the original knot all the more difficult; for again a precisely similar story also prevails among the original inhabitants of Degama, who, although outnumbered by the New Calabar people, and a degenerate lot, still cling to the same locality and maintain a miserable existence by fishing. In one sense, these various traditions, identical as they are in substance, would altogether simplify this complex question of origin, that is, if we were prepared to accept them as originating from the same source. This, however, is scarcely possible, so difficult is it to arrive at any authentic basis as to the story being purely traditional or merely mythical. Still, for all that, it would point to the possibility of a common origin at some remote period, which is partially corroborated by the existing affinity of their dialects, and entirely so by the identity of their sociology.

Three different tribal elements then, it will be seen, have combined together in the formation of the Brass tribe, and it is interesting to notice that while the religion—and the tribal god more particularly—has remained Bini, the language now in general use is that of the Ijo. From the former circumstance there is little room for doubt regarding the true origin of Alepe, while from the latter the evidence of the domination of the Bini and New Calabar elements by the Ijo is equally convincing, and, due as it undoubtedly was to inter-marriage, the extinction of two languages, and the adoption of a third language entirely different from them both, seemed to the most intelligent of my Brass informants an altogether inexplicable matter; but it is not quite so inscrutable as it appears, for, as I will endeavour to show later on, it was not so much a case of adoption, as of absorption, which

was all the more enhanced through social and commercial intercourse.

Nembe, low lying, marshy, and absolutely surrounded by a network of creeks and mangrove swamps, is, from barbaric considerations of secrecy, safety, and convenience, splendidly situated, commanding the head-waters of various waterways. In regarding the network as a spider's web, Nembe is the centre, from which ever so many large channels radiate in all directions, southward to the Brass and St. Nicholas rivers, eastwards to the Nun branch of the Niger, northwards towards the main river itself and the Engenni, a fine stream connecting this with the Degama river, and westward towards the Santa Barbara, St. Bartholomew, and the Sombrero rivers. So that a more ideal spot for a pirate or a slaver—in both of which occupations Alepe and his immediate descendants no doubt engaged—cannot be well conceived. For it was not only skilfully concealed, but easily defended, as it commanded the heads of the converging creeks, which, in case of necessity or defeat, could be utilised as so many ready-made lines of retreat.

Of the Jekri also there is much more definite, although to a certain extent contradictory, evidence. According to one account they are said to have been closely connected with the Yoruba, the Warri kingdom having extended to and embraced Lagos as well as some of the surrounding territory. To this day, in fact, Jekri inhabit the strip of country stretching along the coast from the Benin river westward to Lagos.

Another and undoubtedly the true version, in spite of the fact that their language is cognate with Yoruba, affirms them to have been derived from the Bini, although now, on the eastern side especially, their blood has mingled very much with that of the Sobo, Igabo, and, in a lesser degree, the Ijo.

According to native tradition, Lagos, or Eko, as it is called by the natives, was originally founded by a Bini army, who had in the first instance been despatched by the King of Benin to collect tribute from his refractory vassals at "Ogulata," a place to the north of the island on which the present town is situated. Having failed in his mission, the commander, fearing to return, settled on the island with his warriors, and, in spite

of the pardon that was promised and the hopes which were held out to them, they steadily refused to return to Benin. Subsequently, however, they and the Ogulata people—with whom, through intermarriage and other social relations, they were on good terms—acknowledged the suzerainty of the Bini monarch, and became incorporated into a dependency that paid an annual tribute. In this way the name given to the islet and the settlement on it by these warrior settlers was Aonin or Awani<sup>1</sup>—afterwards corrupted to Oni by European traders—as showing its connection with Benin City, and the stock from which they were descended.

Conflicting as this may appear, it is not in reality so contradictory, when the fact is taken into consideration that in olden times the Benin empire, quite apart from its numerous dependencies, was divided into two separate states—Benin proper and Warri. This, it seems, had been a purely amicable division that had occurred through the excessive growth of the royal family, by which an arrangement had been effected that provided for the removal of the younger branch to the latter place as a tributary vassal to the elder. And from all accounts it is more than possible, if not evident, that the army of warriors who founded Lagos proceeded in reality from Warri, but doubtless by command of the King of Benin. It is also a matter of certainty that many of these outlying dependencies or tributaries of the parent kingdom were established in exactly the same manner as Brass and Lagos: as a result, in the first place, of the failure of some specific mission, carrying with it the fear of retributive consequences; and, in the second, the natural desire for personal independence, and to shake off the oppression of a yoke which threatened to consign their spiritual existence to an eternal doom of disembodiment.

That Warri is the same locality which Barbot and other travellers or writers allude to under various cognomens—among others, Awerri and Oveiro—is quite certain; also the fact that the chief town of the kingdom to which it belonged was Aoni or Awini,<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* descended from Ini or Bini. Indeed, until quite

<sup>1</sup> This, as being traditional, cannot be given as final, for both pronunciations are quoted by the natives.

recently—and even now among the natives themselves—the Jekri were certainly known to the Abo as Iwini, and to the Brassmen as Senama; and, notwithstanding the fact that during modern times Warri has been practically independent, prior to the destruction of Benin City by the English in 1897 the reigning prince and chiefs always paid tribute and acknowledged the supremacy of the elder branch—a fact which speaks for itself.

Similarly, it is unquestionable that the Oedo of Barbot and the older authors was the Idu of the Niger and surrounding natives, and the Benin City of the English; for not only is this confirmed by tradition, but the name is still in use at the present day among the Abo tribe, as well as among the Ibo of the Lower Niger, between Abo and Idah.

Coming now to the Ijo, we are more than ever confronted with a lack of traditional material, which converts a difficult matter into a task that is well-nigh impracticable. Wild, unruly, and practically inaccessible; divided, too, into many different clans and sections, isolated from each other and speaking several dialects, it was absolutely impossible to obtain information that was either reliable or authentic. So that it was only possible by means of other local traditions and certain lingual affinities to trace the connection that at one time undoubtedly must have existed between them and the Bini; and in this way it is tolerably evident that they first of all originated from the latter, and then, after breaking away from them, remained under the suzerainty of their king. But it is also manifest that as time went on, and synchronously with the dwindling power of the parent monarchy, this connection loosened and lessened gradually until it ceased to exist, except perhaps in a mere nominal and certainly in a religious sense; although even in this latter direction it is quite certain that the oracle of the Aro Chuku was more often appealed to than that of the once far-famed and paramount Benin.

That Benin, as the capital of a once famous kingdom, was first discovered by the Portuguese under Affonso de Arrio in 1485, and sixty-eight years later visited by Captain Thomas Wyndham, an English seaman, are facts that have long since passed into history. Ages prior to this comparatively modern



date, however, it is only reasonable to conjecture that this kingdom, which even in its diminished state was powerful, had at one time formed a mighty and extensive empire that covered in all directions a great area. For the origin of the Bini, unlike the more civilised races of Chaldea, Assyria, and Egypt, who have left behind them records and memorials that are practically imperishable, must ever remain enshrouded in mystery. Yet it is just possible, when curiosity is healthy and directed in the right channel, for speculation to arrive at or near the truth—a contingency that it is hoped may have occurred in this particular instance.

But if the problem that so far has engaged our attention has been extremely intricate, that which concerns the origin of the Ibo is still more so, for it is a very maze within a maze. Here, except from a philological aspect, we are face to face with an evolution which is practically interminable, for certain important complexities have to be taken into consideration.

These people form a tribe, but in no sense a nation, with a population numbering anything between five and six millions, scattered over a large area, and divided into numerous clans speaking different dialects, and split up again into innumerable communities, which not only hold aloof from but are inimical to each other, as if belonging to entirely separate nationalities, so that the absolute hopelessness of finding a clue or of tracing any connected associations to a common source has no doubt become apparent—all the more so in the face of a country that was unfortunately disturbed in many portions and unsettled throughout, with a population who were in consequence either unfriendly or at least suspicious. By way of illustration, a few instances of local traditions selected at random will in every way substantiate all that has been advanced with regard to the insuperable difficulties that, in this specific direction more particularly, it was my lot to contend against.

Commencing with Ohumbele, a large town of the Ndoki clan, situated on a small creek that runs into the Imo river some 50 miles from the mouth, all that the old people would or could tell me was this. In the time of their fathers who

lived before those fathers whom they could remember, a hunter, by name Ebele, was the progenitor to whom they all owed their origin. Where he himself came from they were not able to say. All they knew was that he was first of all living at Ohanko, a town about 8 miles to the north of Ohumbele. In those days it happened that there were two towns, by name Intsina and Eberu—presumably to the south,—the inhabitants of which, who were at war with those of Ohanko, were constantly attacking the latter with long spears and poisoned arrows. In this way many deaths had resulted, when Ebele appeared upon the scene. He, it appears, was armed with what at that time was known as “a king’s gun,” one of the old flint-locks—a fact which seems to point to his having come from the direction of either Old Calabar or Ibani,—and was present one day when the enemy made one of their periodical attacks on the friends with whom he was staying. Going to their assistance with his regal and trusty weapon, he shot several of the enemy. The others, who had never even heard of a gun, seeing their comrades fall as if struck by an invisible hand, came and shook the bodies, but finding them lifeless, they fled in terror, and never again ventured to attack Ohanko.

After this remarkable occurrence Ebele, hailed by the people as their saviour, settled down amongst them, and very rapidly became a man of great influence, as well as substance. Many years passed by in peace and quietness, when suddenly a dispute arose between the two leading factions of the town. Unable to settle the matter amicably among themselves, they called him in as mediator. That this unknown hunter was no less distinguished in the double-tongued art of diplomacy than he was in the science of war is quite evident,—a fact that is in no sense surprising; for among a natural people the leader invariably is not only a man of action but a man of words—a thinker and talker, yet a doer as well. So, grasping the fact that matters were too far gone for settlement, and in order to avoid an open rupture, Ebele decided on separating the contending factors. In this way it was arranged that while one of them remained at Ohanko the other removed to Obaku, only some three or four miles off. The division,



having been agreed to by both parties, was effected without any further disagreement or disturbance, and as soon as it was completed Ebele himself took possession of what is now called Ohumbele.

At Akwete, only 7 miles distant, the people, like the former, belong to the Ndoke clan of the Ibo race. Yet their principal deity is "Nkwu Abasi," which means "the God from the 'Sea'—literally 'Bigwater'—far away." As "Abasi" among the Ibibio and Efik is also the supreme god—the Creator, in fact—this would seem to imply the existence of a former connection between the Ndoke and Ngwa clans of the Ibo and the Ibibio, who live contiguous to them. Nkwu, too, is evidently derived from the same root as Nkwa or Kwa, *i.e.* Ibibio, while the fact that the divinity is believed to have come some distance from the big water—probably a large river or estuary—demonstrates that at an earlier period of their history these people were all of one origin and a coast tribe. Yet on looking into the history of "Oga," the second deity in importance to "Nkwu Abasi," we find that the worship of him is common to Obu-akpu, Okrika, and Afam; the former, which is an offshoot of Akwete, having introduced him from the latter. But as this place "Afam," which lies towards the Ibo interior, is pure Ibo, the question of origin becomes more complicated than ever, for so continuous have been the expansions, yet so constant the intermingling of these various units, that it is practically impossible to trace the end of one or the beginning of the other.

In the interior the same absence of all except recent tradition, which even then is extremely meagre, is most marked. To take just one example. All that the people of Umudru-onha know with regard to their past is that they are descended from a family called "Oba," which lived in a country by name Amadgwio. Subsequently, when the family had grown too big, an exodus of several of the households took place, and there was a general scattering of them in all directions. Ever since then they had remained in their present location, but they still adhered to the same god Ogidi, who had always been the god of their ancestors, and

who was represented by a pillar of chalk in the water beyond Umudru-onha.

Going up the Niger, and selecting Asaba on the western bank, which, by the way, is called Ahaba by its own inhabitants and Araba by the people in the neighbourhood, we find that it originally belonged to a community on the eastern side of the river, by name N'tege, which lies at the back of Onitsha; the separation having occurred in the time of their forefathers, presumably some two or three hundred years ago. For a reason they could not divulge, but due no doubt to the fact that they believed themselves to be the off-spring, therefore subject to Nri—a district some 40 miles eastward of Ahaba, the kings and chiefs of which had been the head of the original household,—the privilege of crowning the kings of the latter place is still possessed by the former. In addition to this ancient rite the chiefs of Nri, as well as of Igboza—a town 7 miles to the west of Ahaba—who belong to the elder or patriarchal branch, possess the privilege of both circumcising and ornamenting with indigo the bodies of their younger kinsmen, the only explanation of this weird custom being ascribed to the inability of the former to perform these operations for themselves.

Nri or N'shi—evidently the same place, but a different pronunciation of it—is a town which is situated about forty to fifty miles to the east, *i.e.* behind Onitsha, on the east bank of the Niger, just below its confluence with the Anambara, in the district of Isu or Isuama, or the country of Isu. The inhabitants of this particular town are known as “king-makers”—in other words, they possess the sole prerogative of conferring the title of royalty in all the Ibo country lying on the right bank of the river, the distinguishing insignia being an anklet made out of pineapple fibre. They also, it appears, enjoy the privilege of walking untouched or unharmed through any portion of the same—a privilege which lower down to the south is extended to the Ama-Ofo, or people known as Aro or Inokun, just as among the Ibibio all members of the Idion fraternity are entitled to a similar privilege within the borders of their own territory. It is in a certain measure evident that somewhere in this locality of

Isumma, in which the purest Ibo is said to be spoken, is to be found the heart of the Ibo nationality ; consequently it is quite reasonable to look among its people for the original fountain-head from which all the other clans have sprung. This inference too is supported not only by the purity of the language, but by this right of dispensing or rather of conferring royalty which is undoubtedly the prerogative of the Nri or N'shi people.

Once more let us return to the vicinity of the Niger, to a place called Onitsha-Mili, lying a few miles to the north-west of Asaba. Here the tradition is that this place, along with the towns of Onitsha-Olona, Onitsha-Ukwu, Onitsha-Ugbo, and Onitsha-Ukwuani, migrated or were driven out, presumably between two to three hundred years ago, from the near vicinity of Benin City, which they speak of as Ado-n-Idu.

Crossing over the river to the east bank, some four or five miles below Asaba, is another community, comprising a principal town and several outlying villages, which is merely called Onitsha, that in olden days was undoubtedly the parent stock from which those now on the western side had been derived. According to its elders, fourteen generations since Ado-n-Idu was the capital of an extensive kingdom embracing many countries, but having religion, customs, and language in common, over which Oba ruled as king. At the time in question Onitsha, situated to the westward of Benin, and between it and the river, was one of these countries. It happened one day that Asije, the royal mother of this great monarch, went on to one of the farms belonging to Onitsha-Mili, for the purpose, it appears, of gathering sticks, for which she was seized and beaten by the people to whom the farms belonged. On her return to Benin she reported the matter of her ill-treatment to the king, and he at once ordered his younger brother Gbunmara, the commander-in-chief of his forces, to punish the insult which had been offered to his royal mother. Gbunmara immediately mustered a large army, and lost no time in invading the territory of Onitsha, the king of which, with all the available men whom he could collect, opposed him. After two days' severe fighting, however, the

latter were defeated, and, sooner than surrender, the entire community retired to the locality on the western bank which is now occupied by the greater majority of their descendants, but a small portion made their way southward towards Abo. Tsimba the king, however, with his two sons Ekensu and Oreze and their households, retreated right across the river, and settled in the same spot that their successors now occupy.

But in leaving Ado-n-Idu behind them, these people then and for ever abandoned their Bini nationality and language. For even those who have remained on the western bank, and who are therefore within easy touch of Benin, are Ibo in every essential, talking pure Ibo, and not a mixed language, or even a dialect, in which Bini words are to be found. Yet the spirit of Tsimba, their more modern founder and ancestor, is still with them, living and embodied in the same tree which he planted with his own hand.

In succession to him, the following kings have reigned over Onitsha :—Tsinwukwa, Nafia, Atasia, Tsimezei, Tsimefi, Azoli, Tsimedie, Omozele, Ijelakpe, Udogwu, Akazue, Diali, Anazonwu. With regard to the election to the kingly office, there are in Onitsha four communal divisions, viz. Ulutu, Gbeneke, Ado, and Eke n'ubene, to whom all matters are referred. To Ugwu n'obamkpa belongs the absolute right of conferring what is called "Ofo"—the god of truth and justice—upon the chief or individual who is elected king. This rite is absolutely indispensable, and without it no one can be elected to the office—so much so that when a member of one of the few royal families of Onitsha has been nominated, his nomination, to be valid, must be ratified and sanctioned by Ugwu n'obamkpa.

It is useless, from a practical standpoint, to pursue this subject of tradition any further, for the same woeful lack of material and the same hopeless confusion confronts us at every turn. Even among the Aro section, which is undoubtedly the most intelligent of all the Ibo clans, there was nothing either definite or reliable.

The reverence and precedence which is accorded to the Nri section by all the other Ibo clans proper in their vicinity, is evidence in favour of the belief which prevails



among them, that the latter are descended from the former. For when all the circumstances in connection with the matter are inquired into, it is quite evident that the homage in question has nothing whatever to do with considerations arising from social and commercial intercourse, or from any question of martial or material supremacy (because the Nri are now not only more or less scattered, but are in no sense either a powerful or a warlike family); but, on the contrary, because it is acknowledged that they are the highest representatives of sacerdotalism in the Ibo race—an office carrying with it certain sacred attributes, which has undoubtedly been handed down to them as an ancestral heirloom by virtue of the law of primogeniture. Yet, with the exception of this proverb, "The street of the Nri family is the street of the gods, through which all who die in other parts of Iboland pass to the Land of Spirits," there are no traditions of any kind in support of this.

But, in addition to this evidence of descent, the fact that the presence of some of these priests at all of the most important religious functions and ceremonies in Iboland proper is considered indispensable, is additional evidence in respect to their origin. Thus, when a chief is about to assume the kingship of his community, he is obliged to have a representative from Nri, who becomes the master of all the necessary ceremonies; for without his presence the whole function becomes irregular, if not invalid.

In connection with this specific ceremonial it is also essential that the budding monarch should receive from the Nri priest certain requisite ornaments, without which the former is unable even to offer kola-nuts to the tribal gods. Further than this, the latter is allowed to have free access to the person of any king, whose prerogative is practically an empty sound, so far as he is concerned.

Again, there are certain actions which, as being, in native opinion, inconsistent with the requirements of the earth, are regarded as serious offences. Whenever, therefore, any one belonging to a community commits an offence of this nature, the rest of the people take alarm, because it is generally regarded as an upsetting of the order and harmony of things,

both in their spiritual and temporal affairs. At this juncture the Nri people step into the breach, as peacemakers, to effect a reconciliation between the offenders and the gods; for misconduct of this nature is always considered to be a crime against the land, or a general pollution of the material earth.

The Nri theocracy, having intervened, at once prescribe certain essential objects as victims of purgation. In some cases the shedding of blood is absolutely necessary. This ceremony is invariably performed by a special representative from Nri, who, after he has performed the sacrifices at different shrines or centres belonging to the community, endeavours to allay the fears of the people by assuring them that the blood has become a sure and effective ransom.

But with regard to the sanctity of Nri origin, in addition to the evidence that has been brought forward, it is further believed that no religious rite is so striking or so effectual as that which is performed by these priests, who hold their office merely as a divine and sacred right; for by virtue of this priority they are said to be in possession of numerous attributes that have been imparted to them by their ancestors, and which are reserved for the use and purpose of the gods alone. Moreover, they have a special and peculiar method of utilising or expressing these attributes. Indeed, their manner of conducting religious ceremonials, more especially with regard to touch, and to the way in which they handle the various emblems of worship, is considered to be particularly practical and effective.

As in some measure supporting these statements, the following are the communities who, as more or less paying an annual tribute to the Nri to this day, acknowledge in the most direct way of all their ancestral lineage:—

1. Abam Uny-agu, occupying the southern district of Iboland proper, and comprising the communities of Isu-ama, Aba-mili, Agbaja, Ube, etc.

2. Abum Akpukpa, occupying the western district, and including the communities of Ada, Isi n'Agidi, Umutsukwu, Enugwu, Ezi-oweke, Achala, Okuru, Nteji, Abagana, Ifite, Uru, etc.

3. Abum Bianco, occupying the northern district, in



which Adani, Ukpabi, Ukpologwu, Ubulu Odolu, Ikefi, etc., are incorporated.

4. Oka and Nne-ogu.

These, it appears, are the principal divisions into which the Ibo proper are divided, of which the following are said to be offshoots :—

1. Aba teghete, or Agbaja, from which have sprung the towns of Umu-oji, Nkpo, Ogidi, which still bears the name Iteghete, and Obosi.

2. Nteje, from which have been derived Umu-dioka, Asaba, Achala, and Agubri.

3. Nimo; also the Nimo on the opposite bank of the Niger.

4. Ukpo, on both banks.

5. Odumodu, with which are incorporated Umunya, Mgbakwu, Otobo, Nnewu.

6. Okuzu and Nzam.

7. Obosi, to which have migrated portions of Ezetsima, Ugamuma, Iruoghulu, Makwum.

But, decisive enough as this evidence appears to be regarding the origin of the Ibo, it brings us no nearer to that of the Nri, although it certainly confirms the impression that the latter are distinct from and have never been affiliated with the Bini.

## CHAPTER IV

### A GENERAL ANALYSIS OF EXISTING DATA

IT now remains for us to examine the data which have been presented in the previous chapters for the purpose of reducing, if possible, at least a certain amount of order and coherency into the conflicting and chaotic elements. Yet, meagre and disconnected as these data are, they are not, however, entirely valueless, as I will endeavour to demonstrate; but before attempting to do so, a brief capitulation, or summary, is essential to enable us to arrive at conclusions which are in any way definite or intelligible.

It has already been seen that the Efik of Old Calabar, although they claim descent from the Ibo, are most undoubtedly derived from the Ibibio; but from whom these in turn have sprung, unless they are an offshoot of the former, is buried in mystery.

That the Ibani, *i.e.* the Bonny and Opobo people, although they trace their origin to an Ibo and can speak that tongue, also claim connection with Brass.

That the New Calabar natives appear to have been a combination of Efik from Creek Town and of Ijo on the coast, who divided into three sections—one remaining as the New Calabar, the other two separating in the direction of Brass and Bonny.

That the Brassmen, while tracing their origin to the Binis, acknowledge at the same time an influx of Ijo and New Calabar blood.

That nothing is known about the Ijo, except the question of their Bini descent, which, however, rests on the slenderest of evidence.

That the Jekri are most undoubtedly of Bini origin, in spite of their language being affiliated with Yoruba.

That the Bini origin, similar to that of the Ibo, has unfortunately been lost in the oblivion of the past.

This, as has already been remarked, is extremely contradictory, and scanty detail to work upon; but by throwing upon it the light of philology it is possible to obtain a clearer aspect of, if not insight into, the tangled question.

The language of the Efik, Kwa or Akwa, and Ibibio is practically identical. At Bonny and Opobo the Ibani, while able to speak Ibo, have a distinct tongue of their own, which is unknown to the Ibo. Quite unlike and different from the Ibibio group, which includes Andoni, it is the same as Okrika, and different only in dialect from New Calabar, as a reference to the Appendices will show, while it has many words in common and a distinct dialectic affinity with Brass more particularly, and with Ijo in general. Spoken of as Ibani-yen, it is said by the people to be the tongue of their forefathers, just as "Ibani" or "Okuloma" is, without doubt, the proper name of Bonny, which is only a corruption of the native term.

But although the Ibani and Okrika peoples speak the same dialect, they consider themselves to be of different origin from each other, as also do the New Calabar and Brass. Yet the Okrika are also obviously of Ibo descent, though very probably from another part of the country to that from which the founder of the Ibani originally came.

Taking the Ijo language next, a comparison made between it and the Ibani, Okrika, New Calabar, and Brass dialects reveals the fact that all four of them, also Oru, are dialects of the Ijo.

Andoni, on the other hand, is connected with and of the same derivation as the Ibibio or Akwa language. Yet right in the midst of the Andoni clan is a town called N'Koro, the inhabitants of which, who are said to have deserted from Okrika, speak a dialect that is not understood by their present countrymen.

The Ogoni, again, speak a distinct tongue of their own, which, so far as I could discover, is quite different from Ibo or Ijo, and about which I was unfortunately unable to get any reliable information.

Going to the Ogbayan district, another lingual problem, more complicated even than that of the Ibani or the Jekri,

confronts us. Tracing their origin, as these people do, to a Brassman named Olei, who deserted from Oma-mabiri and settled at Olobiri, the meaning of the word "Ogbayan" is that of "a country which has been resettled or reconstructed through misfortune." Comprising as it now does a population numbering over 30,000, living in some ten to twelve towns, the people, in spite of their Brass descent, speak quite a different language, and, what is more, one which is said by the natives to be distinct from any of the principal languages in the Delta. But this is not all, for right in the middle of their district and mixed up with them are some people calling themselves Alisa, who belong to a separate tribe with a tongue of its own, yet who speak Ogbayan.

From what, so far, is known of the Ijo, Jekri, and Bini languages, the former is said to have but a slight resemblance to the latter, and this again to the Jekri, which resembles more, or rather is cognate with, the Yoruba. This curious circumstance is all the more significant and worthy of remark when the facts are taken into consideration, that the Ijo and Jekri are direct descendants of the Bini, and that in spite of their separation, presumably for the last few centuries at least, they have all the same been more or less in touch with one another. Yet an examination of the six or more dialects of Ijo and the five of Bini, of which Sobo and Igabo are practically one, shows that they are dissimilar not only to each other, but to the other neighbouring tongues.

The Ibo country, as has already been pointed out, is both extensive, populous, and divided into numerous clans and communities, speaking dialects which vary in degree from slight to considerable. I speak, of course, entirely with regard to that portion of it with which I was associated, and the people with whom I came into personal touch. These were the Aro or Ama-Ofo, Abam, N'doke, Ngwa, Omuma, Ohuhu, Orata, Isuama, N'kwere, Ekwe, Mbeari, Oratshi, Engeni, Abua, Abaja, Akpam—all of them situated between the Niger and Cross rivers,—Abo and Niger Ibo, *i.e.* the dialect spoken by the people on the eastern and western banks.

Comparing the language as it is spoken in all of these different localities, the dialectical variations are not very

marked, the purest dialect being spoken, as already pointed out, in Isuama and neighbourhood, while the most pronounced difference is to be found between the Niger dialect, especially that which is spoken right on the river or on its western bank, and that of the more eastern sections, which lie nearer to the Cross river and in proximity to the Ibibio. It has been suggested by missionaries and travellers that the languages spoken by the Ibibio, Efik, Andoni, and others have all been derived from Ibo at some ancient period; also that there is a distinct dialectical affinity between the Ijo dialects of Oru, Brass, Ibani, and New Calabar, and the Isuama dialect of Ibo. Indeed, Dr. Baikie, in his *Narrative of a Voyage on the Niger*, expresses the opinion that "all the coast dialects from 'Oru' to 'Old Calabar' are either directly or indirectly connected with 'Igbo'" (*i.e.* Ibo), which latter, he states, Dr. Latham informed him is certainly related to the "Kafir" class, and he has but little doubt, when critically examined, that "Mitshi" and "Juku" will prove to be members of the same extensive family.

While not by any means endorsing this statement in its entirety, it is quite possible that there may be some remote connection between Ibo and the other tongues of the Delta as represented by the Ijo and the Ibibio dialects.

To me it seems that there are two distinct tribes, belonging of course to the same great Negroid race: the Ibo in the upper portion, and the Bini, as represented by the various sections of the Ijo, in the lower. Further, it appears that while the former tribe were pushed westward from the eastern portion of Central Africa into the apex formed by the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers, the latter had been driven directly from a more northerly direction.

However these two great African divisions were originally formed and divided subsequently into races, a study of the continent from a geographical standpoint suggests the inference that in its northern half Africa is divided into three distinct portions or strips; the northern and southern strips—that is, in the first instance, from Morocco to Egypt, and in the second from Senegambia and Liberia on the westward across to Dar Senaar on the east—being cut in two by the



intervening deserts of Sahara and Libya. It is reasonable, therefore, to infer that the aboriginal inhabitants, when driven backward by external invasions, retired in two lines southward and to the west—the direct pressure coming from the North African races—until they were gradually pushed towards the sea-coast; among others, those who are now the Ibo coming in at the angle of the two great rivers, or across the lower portion of the Benue and the present Bini, higher up on the Niger, *i.e.* more from the north-east.

None of these Nigro-Hamitic tongues, so far at least as one can learn from mere comparison of them, have any, or apparently very much, affinity with the Nilo-Hamitic or those which are in existence south of the Equator. That doubtless there is some connection between them, and that in certain respects these simple and primitive tongues are of Shemitic character, is not for me to dispute; but to inquire into the nature of this association is quite outside the scope of the present work.

It is just possible that the influence of Carthage on the regions of the Niger with its demand for ivory and gold, but most of all for slaves, was an extremely potential factor of discord among the tribes engaged, as well as those who occupied the central portion of the continent towards the west and south—an element which, resulting as it was bound to do in war, also resulted in a gradual but eventual shifting of the weaker tribes across the Joliba and Benue rivers; while it is further possible that these tribes may have afterwards become mixed and incorporated with the aboriginal negroes, who had no doubt been also pushed down there at a more remote period.

It is not my intention to do more than merely refer to this reputed connection; but, according to missionary research, both the Efik and Ibo tongues abound in Hebraisms, while the construction of sentences, the verbal significations, the mode of comparison, are also typical of the Hebrew; and in the same way nouns, adverbs, and adjectives are formed from the single roots of verbs and other elementary parts of speech. Should this prove to be the case, by supporting the above theory it might then be quite possible to trace the former connection of the aboriginal with certain racial units of the



North African family ; but in no case, however remote, does it seem possible to connect the pure Negroid race with the pure Shemitic. What to me appears most significant is the fact that although the Ibo and Efik are now practically different tongues, this resemblance in the construction of both to the Hebrew would, if true, point to the deduction that they were formerly derived from the same original tongue, that had bifurcated into different dialects through contact with local tribes whose tongues were quite distinct from each other.

Under the conditions which have always existed among these Delta tribes—conditions of war, of pillage, and of slavery, of drastic measures and enforced methods—it is an impossibility for an altogether personal matter such as language to exist, much less to endure. So the tongue of the weaker tribe becomes merged or absorbed into that of the stronger, or, as frequently occurs, ceases to exist after the birth of an entirely new generation. In this way we have seen, in more than one instance which has come within my own personal experience, that whole communities of people have, under new or altered conditions, abandoned their mother tongue and adopted the language of the country which either force or circumstance had compelled them to become inhabitants of.

Commencing with Bonny and its people, if they are of Ibo origin, as all the evidence obtainable appears to prove, it is also palpable that, coming as they first of all did into the Ijo country unprovided with females of their own race, they intermarried with the former, so that in course of time their original tongue was abandoned, or, to be more correct, gradually assimilated and lost in the speech of the people around them. And when we take into consideration the fact that a similar process was evolving in their immediate vicinity with the Okrika—also of Ibo origin,—and a little farther off, among the New Calabar people—an Efik offshoot,—with both of whom they were in touch and as a rule on good terms,—it is not in the least surprising that, different although the Ibani and New Calabar were to each other because of varying origins and local conditions, they evolved for themselves separate yet affiliated dialects out of the common Ijo tongue.

In exactly the same way that the Ibani, Okrika, and New

Calabar people assumed the language of their adopted country and discarded their own native tongues, the Brassmen changed their pure Bini into an Ijo dialect, which in more remote days had at one time itself evolved from the self-same stock.

With regard to the Ibani, however, one fact is deserving of notice, and that is, that more recently—say within the last eighty to a hundred years more particularly,—trading as they have done in Ibo markets, they have practically become half Ibo, and once more resumed their ancient tongue, but only in addition to their own.

Without making any further allusion to the cases of Nkoro and the Ogbayan, we have in the history of the Jekri another unmistakable illustration of the uncertainty of the lingual test when applied to primitive people such as these Delta natives are. That they were of pure Bini origin there is not the slightest doubt, and what is equally certain is that, settling as they did at a comparatively modern date among the Aku tribe of the Yoruba, their dialect became so strongly influenced that it is now classed as cognate with the latter language, which, like the Igara, belongs to the great North African family.

A still more striking example, however, is that of Onitsha. For here we find a whole community, numbering now, at the lowest computation, 100,000 souls, Ibo in every respect, who 250 years ago at the most were Bini in language, as in everything else.

In the broader and deeper sense of the word, not a single tribe in the Niger Delta—not even the Ibo, in spite of their numerical strength and greater unity of language, *i.e.* in contrast with the greater differences which exist among the other tribes and clans—can be called a nation. For the natural environment of the whole country, covered over as it is, and still more was, by an impenetrable forest intersected by streams forming ready-made places for concealment, is essentially compatible with the prevailing spirit of isolation and independence that is so marked a characteristic of all these natives—a feature that the narrower instincts of jealousy and self-interest have helped to intensify a hundredfold, outcome as these are of a system whose principles are essentially selfish and personal.

Yet from a sociological standpoint there is a marked unity, with but trifling exceptions, in their general characteristics, their customs, laws, and religion, that also in a wider sense is distinctly national; the variations being nothing more nor less than petty or insignificant differences in formulas nor habits that have arisen partly as the outcome of varying conditions, but in a greater measure out of the self-imposed idiosyncrasies or individualities of autocratic patriarchs.

In speaking of this sociological unity I do not refer merely to the Ibo, or for the matter of that to the Ijo and the Bini, but to one and all of the tribes of the Delta who have been enumerated in Chapter II. For, looking at the question in the very broadest sense, if it is true with regard to a moiety, it is equally true of the whole. What is more to the point is the fact that the only evidence regarding the identity of these people is to be looked for in the identity of their social life. Not that the proximity of the different units to one another, or even their intercourse and commingling, is absolutely direct or infallible evidence, but because it is impossible to avoid taking into consideration the fact that a primitive religion such as theirs is merely a natural and an independent evolution, altogether irrespective of tribal divisions and associations.

### KINGS OF BONNY

- |                     |                          |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Alagbariye.      | 6. Edimini.              |
| 2. Opkraindole.     | 7. Kamalu.               |
| 3. Opuamakubu.      | 8. Dappa (Great or Opu). |
| 4. Okpara-Ashimini. | 9. Amakiri.              |
| 5. Ashmini.         | 10. Appinya.             |
| 11. Warri.          |                          |

|                    |                                                     |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| King Holliday Owsa | } Short quantumvirate—<br>all princes of the blood. |
| Igbani             |                                                     |
| Bupor              |                                                     |
| Ipor               |                                                     |

- |                                          |                      |
|------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 12. Perekule, afterwards<br>King Pepple. | 16. Bereibibo.       |
| 13. Foubra (Agbaa).                      | 17. Dappa (William). |
| 14. Foubra } Sons of                     | 18. George.          |
| 15. Opobo } Perekule.                    |                      |



PART II

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE PEOPLE  
AS EXPRESSED IN WORDS, NAMES, PROVERBS,  
AND FABLES





## CHAPTER I

### A PREPARATORY CHARACTER SKETCH

LIKE Nature, these natives, taken in the mass, are a people of moods, passive and apathetic on the whole, but active when aroused, their passions and energies, like an inactive volcano, lying but dormant, and although intensely and realistically human, they are at the same time animalistic to the core. Conservative to a degree, they are moody and variable, in spite of the fact that they are not only averse but opposed to change and innovation. It is quite impossible, therefore, to judge of them from first, or even subsequent impressions, for it is only possible to know them by a study of the contrasts and changes that they are subject to, as well as of the underlying motives which are at the bottom of them.

The country may be described as one in which Nature is at her worst. From the slime and ooze of the soil up to the devitalising heat and humidity of the atmosphere, it leaves its mark on the people in an enervating and demoralising influence, which continues unbroken and perpetual, without any of those compensating or redeeming features that tend in the direction of vitality or recuperation.

Speaking of these natives as a whole, if there is any special or leading characteristic which attracts attention more than any other, it is their simplicity. For in a strictly natural sense, it is the simplicity of Nature pure and simple, that frank and open calm that is to be seen on the smooth surface of a lake or sea, which, while it apparently reflects the pure and unadulterated truth in the beautiful blue of the sky above, conceals from mortal gaze all the dross and impurities which

lie beneath in the depths, and are unseen. In a unit such as I am endeavouring to describe, it is but natural to expect and to find a condition of extremes—of that natural polarity, with its forces, that attract in one direction, and its energies, which repel in another; yet a polarity that combines in one firm cohesion, so that it is difficult under such an aspect to detect the presence of dualism or opposing factors.

To gauge the matter thoroughly it is necessary to dive beneath the still surface into the muddy shoals of this gaping mental abyss. Then when we have done so, we will at once discover that there is in fact much of the vegetal, so to speak, in the composition of these people, as well as of the air and soil out of which this has developed. Most of all is this to be seen in that dumb but palpable sensitiveness, that shrinking, as it were from touch, which is so characteristic of certain vegetal growths, but which under present circumstances, is best expressed by the sensitive plant, *Mimosa pudica*, whose leaves close or shrivel up when touched. For so extremely touchy and sensitive are these people—the Ijo particularly so,—so easily piqued and disturbed, even by the mildest of chaff, that they have no hesitation in taking their own lives or the lives of others, on the spur of the moment. Yet the prevalent opinion among Europeans is, that they are a thick-skinned, insensate lot, without feeling of any kind, and in a certain direction they are all this, but they are also sensitive to a degree, and indeed peculiarly so,—not merely because they are stubborn and contumacious, therefore resent any form of authority or control, or, yet again, that they object to be thwarted in the merest trifles, but simply and solely because they are naturally so.

But more than the “vegetal”—more so, at least, in all that makes for the mobility and movement of life—the animal lives in them, most of all in those radical instincts which human intelligence, unable as it is to detach itself from them, in a great measure aggravates and electrifies. It is, in fact, this intelligent, this nature-inspired animalism, which explains the subtlety of their simplicity, or equally the simplicity of their subtlety, and in no phase of their temperament is their dualism seen so much as in this. So, although similar to the domestic

tabby they are given to domesticity, there are occasions when the stealth and ferocity of the bush-cat is very prominent. So, too, they possess much of the fierce but steady impetuosity of the driver ants of their forests, who, once they change their quarters or get on the move, allow no impediment to stand in their way, but march on in serried ranks through or over every obstacle. Yet there is much of the pliant guile of the serpent in them, which enables them to conceal their intentions, with all the deadly secrecy and sincerity of a silence and a nature that takes no one into its confidence, and which bases much of its philosophy on the movements and habits of the slow-moving but sure and deliberate tortoise. So to them, this inoffensive and unobtrusive little animal, with its snake-like head and shell back, is a man, *i.e.* has the soul of a man, and according to this line of thought a man is called and spoken of as the tortoise.

To make my meaning clearer, however, let us for the moment utilise the word "slim," which is so familiar an expression among the Boers and Afrikaners of South Africa. There is no word, not at least to my knowledge, in any known language which describes this specific idiosyncrasy of these people so well. To be slim, then, is to be sly and artful, or, as I prefer to call it, natural, *i.e.* to be skilled in all the wiles, arts, and deceptions which are to be learnt from Nature—arts, in fact, which are purposely screened from view with the object of stealing a march round the flanks or to the rear of an enemy, before he has even had time to suspect any danger. It will be interesting for a few moments to examine their own word for subtlety. This, which is "di aghugho," means literally a state or being of fraud or trickery, "aghugho" being a fraud or trick, and "di" meaning be, or exist. But this word "aghugho," or its diminutive "gho," also means cheat, and with "wa" prefixed to it, elude, while, replacing the initial vowel by an "n," and again borrowing the prefix "di," it implies to be skilful. And it is exactly in this primitive aspect, which detects no difference between the fraud and elusiveness of skill, and the skill of fraud and elusiveness, that it is quite possible to find the "slimness" of native simplicity.

It is true that most of these natives—the Ijo and Ibibio particularly—especially among those who have not reached the years of discretion, are highly excitable, intensely emotional, and extremely impulsive, fundamentally neurotic, in fact. In this respect they are natural, like children, betraying their feelings in the same emotional and impulsive manner. More so, however, than children, they have moods beside and beyond the ordinarily serious and reflective, reserved and philosophic moods, when they retire, like the tortoise, into the outer shell of this existence, inside which they live another life, a life all their own and no one else's, in which nothing takes a part but the spirit or mental shadows of their own selves,—a life which, although it is a great and magnificent illusion, is to them a solid reality, because, although it is the shadow of the substance, it is the life-giving shadow, which vitalises the substance, so that it becomes an existence, or a being, that can think and move and act. And it is in this, the most dangerous, as it is the most delusive aspect, that all the slimness of their whole nature is centred to meet or anticipate a threatened attack, to resent an insult, and to retaliate against an injury.

It is only natural to find that suspicion is a feature which is ever present and active, because, like simplicity, it is of course inherent. Apart from this fact, however, there is nothing really strange in this. For experience teaches us that they see in everything an unexpressed but all the more conscious motive, just as in every act they see and feel design. So although they recognise "omission" as an offending causation, they do not acknowledge it as due to pure carelessness or loss of memory. For an "omission" is quite as much an "act" as a "commission"; it is a something omitted, done with intent and deliberation, possibly—as they look at it—through the obtrusive action of other mischievous antipathies. So forgetfulness is an effect, whatever the cause may be, that it is possible to avoid. Chance, coincidence, or accident are accordingly unknown, while design and premeditation, or pre-determinism, are the levers that set in motion the entire machinery of human action. This is in no sense due to any trait of caution in their temperament, for, as a race, a more thoughtless and improvident people is not in existence, but



simply because they leave everything to Nature, from whom they get so much—an inconsistency which is only inexplicable when we do not take into consideration the basic germ, the animal instinct, from which the more expressive human characteristic has developed. Thus the Ibo have a proverb, "Have a care how you deal with your friends, for many of them but seek to get you into their clutches," which is nothing but our own English maxim over again, but with even a deeper and more subtle significance attached to it.

Going to the root of the whole matter, it is only possible to locate this idiosyncrasy in the belief in those instinctive principles which, as we have seen, attribute a precausation to all acts, events, and occurrences in this existence as merely reacts or recurrences of a former period or existence—instincts whose divergent principles, although their origin can be traced to the monism of Nature, have so far remained undiscoverable because of the absolute simplicity of its inner subtleties.

Looked at, then, in all their bare and naked simplicity, although from a cultured and æsthetic standpoint there is a decided natural inferiority, physically in the appearance, and mentally as regards intelligence, the negroes of Southern Nigeria, in spite of their dark skins, woolly heads, receding foreheads, prognathous jaws, and thick protruding lips, are quite as human as we are. Cultivate their acquaintance, be sympathetic with them, and gain their confidence, and then it will be possible to realise that the same nature is in them as is in the most cultured European—the same gravity and the same humour, the same impulses and emotions, the same dignity and patience, the same reserve and reticence, the same volubility and imprudence, the same vanities and vexations, the same sensitiveness and callousness, the same apathy, indifference, idleness, and ignorance, the same suspiciousness, fear, confidence, veneration, courage, and cowardice, the same love of life, of pleasure, and of display looked at and interpreted in a different manner, the same hates and affections, the same sympathies and antipathies, the same fierce passions.

Full of the tragedy of life, with its woes and sorrows, its misfortunes and its deaths, they are equally alive to its comedies, the joy, the mirth, and the laughter; that is, the

sunshine as opposed to the gloom and darkness. Holding life as cheap as any palm-nut, and spilling blood as if it were water, they sacrifice it aimlessly, according to our advanced ideas, merely to pass it on to another existence, according to their own antiquated notions. Yet valuing it as they but do the coco-nut, because of its substantiality and sanctity, from the dual aspect of human fertility and spiritual consciousness, they take it easily, looking with the same simple ease on the comedy of it with infinite relish and many a coarse jest, although the pathos of existence is always open to rude and brutal disruption, and the grim tragedy of death is not merely an omniscient spirit ready to strike at any moment, but which lives with, and forms part of, their natural existence.

It is evident, then, that the so-called human nature of these sons of Nature is identical with that of the more favoured units of civilisation. It is difficult, in fact, when associating with them, to realise that we are in contact with people who are in any way different to or separated from us by a gulf of time, that not even the chronology of science can span over.



## CHAPTER II

### A PRELIMINARY SURVEY OF NATIVE PHILOSOPHY: ITS NATURAL METHODS AND CHARACTERISTICS

BUT in spite of their undoubted subtlety and powers of silent observation, the philosophy of these natives is not deep. To them the explanation of any matter that is beyond their comprehension is invariably the most obvious, as it often is the first that occurs to them. Not that they are exactly too lazy to think, but because, being purely emotional, they accept the shallower or simpler reason of the emotions as a feeling which, in its tangibility, is to them not only a sufficient reason, but a reason that comes direct to them from the spirit; in other words, the intelligence. It is not that they are too apathetic to think, because in religious matters—and philosophy to them is the very essence of religion—they are essentially all action, but it is that they are misunderstood. For misconception, like ignorance, is responsible for most of the errors in existence, and no one has been more misunderstood than these unfortunate barbarians.

Yet it is impossible to deny that constitutionally they are lazy, or, to be more accurate, slow to move; and this, after all, is not in the least surprising when the physical conditions under which they have so long lived are taken into consideration.

According to European opinion, these natives of West Africa are essentially lazy, and there is no doubt that from a civilised aspect they are; but in judging them we do so much too hastily and positively, without either taking into consideration the conflicting yet accommodating nature of their environment, or making sufficient allowance for the fact

that human action, especially with regard to natural people, depends entirely on a motive or object. Unfortunately for them, however, this object, which to a great extent, if not altogether, is wanting in West Africa, certainly does not obtain in the same ratio, or apply with the same force, as it does in Europe. For their wants are few and far between, and after they have supplied them—an easy matter when Nature has been so liberal—there is nothing left for them to do, and certainly no incentive or inducement that takes the place of an object, except to brood in silence over the hard problems of a dual and divided existence. But even in this direction, so accustomed have they become to the ancient and time-honoured dogmas of their fathers, so tyrannised over are they by these same inflexible shadows, that their activity is confined to a sphere of selfish individualism. Yet give these silent egotists an incentive, supply them with some object, and their dormant and undeveloped energies will soon develop and burst into activity; but before this can be done existing conditions will have to be altered, and this can only be effected gradually, *i.e.* in its own natural time, for a forcing process is bound to react detrimentally on itself.

It is a mistake therefore to conclude that these natives of Southern Nigeria are not thinkers. In this respect they are children unquestionably, for they are always thinking, but their thoughts, although subtle in certain directions (in monetary or political transactions, for example), are not deep, with reference to that deeper knowledge of Nature that we have labelled Science; and the reason of this, due as it is to arrested brain development, is simple in the extreme. Thus it is that their curiosity is so soon and so easily satisfied, not because the desire to go down to the roots or to search into the meaning and mystery of problems is deficient or altogether absent, but because they have not sufficient mental stamina or brain power, and further, because everything outside matter or the substance appears to them in the form of the spirit or shadow. So instead of looking into the mechanism of things, they at once jump at spiritual conclusions, and see in the spirit, which in their belief is inside matter, the explanation of every natural problem, the

psychology or motive of which is a mystery to them. It is this blind animism, then, together with their equally dense conservatism, that is responsible for the density and arrested development of a nature that is naturally subtle and profound. Apart from their aversion to change of any kind, and slaves as these people from time immemorial have been, and are, to custom and conservatism, and the iron discipline of their bogey-ancestors—who in their belief only depart from the flesh to continue a much more potential existence and government in the spirit,—the bulk of the people have their thinking done for them by the priests, doctors, and diviners, who are *de facto* the active thinkers and thought-leaders of their communities. Or rather, they have their thoughts interpreted, and if necessary transformed into actions. Do not misunderstand me, however. This does not in any sense imply that they are not thinkers themselves, for in the mass they are all dreamers of dreams, *i.e.* they think in a vague, indefinite, and impulsive kind of way thoughts that unconsciously become reflected and repeated in their dreams, which to them, however, are actual and personal interviews and interchanges of conversation between their own detachable and mobile souls and those of the departed. But they are passive and silent thinkers, whose power of thought only goes a short and restricted distance. For in spite of their marked impulsiveness and the contumacious, almost aggressive, individualism of their personalities, in matters mystical, *i.e.* spiritual, or those which are beyond their comprehension—and anything outside the ordinary avocations of a cramped and limited life come as a rule within this category—they are as powerless as new-born babes.

In all such questions they are wholly and entirely dependent on and at the mercy of the different fraternities above mentioned, who by virtue of an excess of egoism and of a greater as well as a more subtle mental activity, not only do the active and subtle thinking of the communities, but give a forcible expression to it, by reducing thoughts and words into hard and vigorous acts. Indeed, these professed channels of communication and mediators between the people and the ancestral deities and spirits, as readers of thought and

spiritual Utilitarians, represent, as we shall see later on, in Part III., not merely the active mentality but the real and virile slimness of the people, utilising as they do the very ideas of the latter to suit their own personal aims, ends, and advantages, but with the avowed object of meeting a pressing need or the requirement of the moment. Not that these thought leaders can actually see much, if at all, further than their simpler and blinder dupes, but because they possess to an abnormal degree the faculty of deceiving their clients by means of a sincerity which, although it is based on an illusion, appears to them as real and substantial, because in fact they themselves, owing to excessive over-concentration, are dupes of their own emotional abstractions. For even the more subtle thoughts of these wary leaders, although well weighed, balanced, and deliberated, are unconsciously based on natural impulses and emotions, the outcome of tangible yet capricious sensations, and not the result of a logical train or sequence of ideas.

Yet although in reality their knowledge is not so very much wider or deeper than that of the mass, they, like the Jews of old, are wise in their generation, and possess at least a profounder knowledge of human nature, especially in the direction of its weaknesses and failings.

In spite of commerce possessing all the elements which constitute a conflicting energy, it has ever been a civilising force. For although trade jealousy or rivalry has been the cause and source of many wars and conflicts, no factor, not even religion, has contributed more to the advancement and progress of civilisation. Our own English history, or rather the wider record of North America and the British Empire, is a living illustration of this, while the final victory and expansion of the Dutch into a great maritime nation, after a titanic contest with Spain, which lasted for ninety-seven years, is another equally instructive instance. That it was the courage of their deepest convictions which first of all raised the Dutch and the English out of the slough and inertia of religious dogma, and converted them into a virile people, such as they are now, is reasonably admissible; but the underlying motive of these fundamental convictions was nothing in reality but that basic instinct for action which marks the boundary-



line between the animal and human intelligences ; and thus it is that commerce and religion have invariably co-operated and become inextricably mixed up with each other.

It is manifest throughout the history of human experience that when the commerce of a country declines—in other words, when the vigour and energy of its people diminish—the civilisation of that country either remains at a complete standstill or suffers a serious set back. The canker of moral dry rot, in fact, sets in, which, commencing with trade, ends in a stage of general stagnation or deterioration.

We have before us, in the tribes of the Lower Niger, those of the immediate interior more particularly, a state of society which shows a very early and initial stage of civilisation—a state that consists merely of communities which long ago emerged from a condition of mere animalism into the higher and more intelligent one of human savagery, and from this again to the still more intelligent condition of barbarism, which has advanced no higher, but remained undeveloped, if not fossilised, in every way, mental and physical. And the cause of this stagnation is very evident. Primarily, no doubt, the natural environment has played an exceedingly prominent part in thwarting development, because it has inspired and fostered the narrow, selfish, and fearful spirit of isolation. Similarly commerce, and therefore intercourse, has been excluded, as a consequence development has been nipped in the bud, and progress (otherwise civilisation) has remained where it was, possibly some thousands of years previous to the Christian era. There has, in fact, been no natural or social evolution, because of an unconscious, yet at the same time conscious, opposition to it on the part of those most concerned,—not so much from lack of intelligence, but because the spirit of conservatism and centralisation has altogether dominated, and so expunged, the broader spirit of decentralisation and intercourse.

Yet the intelligence of the people, in spite of its present inferiority, from the dual standpoint of the concrete and abstract, is right enough, merely arrested in its growth, and awaiting the natural opportunity of contact and stimulation from without to make it develop and expand in consonance

with human capabilities. For, as I have endeavoured to impress upon the reader, and as he will see on reading through the book, these natives are in no sense of the word unintelligent. On the contrary, in a natural sense they are extremely subtle, although exceedingly simple, and in spite of the non-development and fossilisation of their brain power, literally tied up as it has been by inside and outside conditions, of their own and Nature's making, they are decidedly capable of improvement and expansion. To give but one instance in proof of this assertion, the most powerful, however, that it is possible to produce, the commercial instinct is distinctly inherent in them, and not only in a potential but in an intelligent sense. This, however, is not all, for in addition the instinct of imitation is equally strong with them. So that a judicious co-operation between two such powerful factors, combined with rational treatment on the part of the British administration, is bound to result in a mental evolution that would tend to grow outward and upward, because given the opportunity, brain development must and can only be a question, or utilisation, of time.

We find the natives of Southern Nigeria living in the identical nature they lived in thousands of years ago, with a moral environment that is unchanged in every aspect. Nature, *i.e.* the earth, with its contiguous and surrounding elements, as it appears to them, is as it were a vast form or organism, which lies closed and inert, yet active, and always in a state of spiritual pregnancy; every aspect or creation of which is sealed by the mystery and by the silence of an animated expression or language, whose character and meaning is beyond the comprehension, or at least the interpretation, of the human intellect. Yet a nature which they believe to be inspired by the spirit or animating principle, good or evil, according to the adjustment of the balance, that speaks to them not in mere words but in hard acts, which alone are intelligible to a limited and literal intelligence such as theirs; and which alone appeals to a moral sense, that although it places the primary or controlling spirit element on a higher plane than the secondary or subservient material embodiment, must first of all be confronted by the substance before it



can appreciate or acknowledge the supremacy of the soul-shadow.

Looking around them, as these people have done, and are still doing, they have found themselves confronted by matter in every single form or aspect of Nature, and connecting spirit with matter and matter with spirit, it is only natural that they discover in material utility an association and a source that is purely spiritual. Be the matter what it may, an opaque stone, a stream of clear and sparkling water, a quivering leaf, a glistening dewdrop, a piece of wood, a lump of mud, to them there is a something indefinite and indefinable, which all the same imparts to the material organism a tangible consciousness (possibly in the sap in wood, or the fire they believe to be in stone, the oscillation and perpetual motion of water, and of the luxuriant foliage of their surroundings), which is connected in their minds with the shadow-soul—in other words, with the animating principle of all things. Indeed, as we shall see when we read on, the entire basis of the whole natural conception of life, *i.e.* of religion and philosophy, is one of personal precedents and associations that are connected together in one long chain or existence of human generations, the links in which are purely and entirely ancestral. It is not merely that in one association they find a blood-flowing or substantial tragedy, and in another only a mirth-exciting comedy. It is not simply that the adjustment of the balance is unattainable, because, in spite of the existence of unity and evenness, disintegration or detachment and inequality are inevitable. It is not only that the right and the wrong, in other words, the supremely spiritual and the slavishly human, in their own contradictory compositions are inextricably compounded and confused, so that at times they find it difficult in practice to distinguish between the two. But it is that they feel more than they see—for mentally they are blinded by a nebula of spirit,—feel it through the sensations and emotions; because, unknown to them, these sensations and emotions are but the reacts of their own forgotten acts, and the conceptions of thoughts that have been unconsciously registered by the brain, therefore unrecognised as their own, and attributed to the spiritual. So they live a dual existence, with spirit-inspired

matter in and around them ; so it is that even the earthen pot, with or without the food and the water that it may hold, and the wooden paddle, along with the canoe which it propels, vibrate with the same yet varying animation that in an ascending scale, through the vegetal and animal, finds its sublimest expression in the God-like reason and speech of man.

In endeavouring, therefore, to fathom the psychology of these people, it is not only imperative that the dualism of their nature should be acknowledged, but that the supremacy of the spiritual over the human, in other words, of illusion or the subjective, as compared with reality or the objective, be clearly recognised. For in no other way is it possible to understand them. This alone will explain why a people who are literal and natural, acknowledging as they do the burden of the flesh and the practical value of utility, or the substantially useful, should live under the entire and absolute control of the non-existent phantasmal. Further, it will also explain the seemingly anomalous assertion that while the supremacy of the latter has certainly kept them from relapsing into the depths of decadent savagedom, it has at the same time prevented them from advancing towards the heights of expanding civilisation.

## CHAPTER III

### THE ESSENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CERTAIN BASIC INSTINCTS

ALTHOUGH the grammatical construction of Efik and of Ibo are, for practical purposes, at all events, absolutely identical, a comparison between the two reveals the fact, not so much of certain differences, as that in both cases, equally so with regard to the other dialects, the variations are due not to any real or substantial difference in the method of construction, but simply because the tongues in question have grown up or evolved out of a succession, first of all, of local conditions and associations, and then of personal needs, wants, and requirements. And this fact will be more than ever evident when we dip beneath the surface into the original associations with which their words were without doubt connected.

It is no easy task which confronts us. (For, as Locke very sapiently remarks, "if we knew the original of all the words we meet with we should thereby be very much helped to know the ideas they were first applied to and made to stand for.") I do not pretend to have solved the original meaning of these primitive expressions, but at least I have the hope that my interpretation of them is as near to the original as it is possible to get with so many solid obstacles in the way, that of time alone being in itself so absolutely immeasurable, to say nothing of dissimilar conditions of life and thought.

One of the first points which impresses itself upon the mind of the earnest student, after he has made a thorough investigation of these Delta dialects, is, as is only to be

expected, with regard to their natural simplicity. The next point, which is equally impressive, relative to the meagreness of their vocabularies, is a fact that is all the more prominently thrust into notice by the employment of the same words to denote not only other phases, features, or connections of a certain natural condition or element, but in many instances of phases or features that are absolutely dissimilar, and which, seemingly at least, have no possible connection, not even in a remote sense, certainly not so far as it is now possible to discriminate, or at all events to appreciate. It is in these two aspects of attachment, and, curiously enough of detachment, more so even than in the systematic evolution or the accidental construction of words from parent roots or primitives, that we shall find what we are in search of. For as we go on we shall see quite plainly how, altogether apart from any idea or even thought of grammar on the part of the primitive ancestors of these people, in whose minds no such conception ever existed, one word evolved or grew out of another, and how this first word was but the delineation or description, and in this way the emblem, of some natural object or feature with which the people had been personally or familiarly associated.

In this way, too, we shall see how it was that association, from the very earliest dawn, first of all of natural instinct, and then of reason-endowed and expressible thought, became the sensible expression of a conception, and how this in turn gave or stimulated further expression to some other thought, which formed but a link or connection between the two. And following up this natural clue, it will then be still more clearly seen how easily and naturally the abstract or phantasmal idea grew out of the solid or substantial object, which as a spirit-containing emblem became to them a type that represented certain human, or as they, of course, thought, divine, attributes. How, too, the impersonal evolved from the personal, or the so-called spiritual from the human, and the mental state of activity from the existence of natural and associated energies.

To avoid any possible misconception, it will be as well at the outset to impress upon the reader the absolute essentiality of this element of association in its relation to the religion of

these and all natural people. For, as we shall see, when we have read to the end, their religion, which, in fact, is their entire sociology and existence, is nothing from beginning to end but a long chain of ancestral precedents, every single link and rivet of which is an association that is now designated under the general and comprehensive term of custom, as a law from their spiritual fathers unto themselves in the flesh. What is more, a searching analysis of these connections makes it clear to us that the relationship existing between them is primarily personal, and secondarily impersonal, although eventually, in the subjection of the human or personal element to the authority of the spiritual or phantasmal, *i.e.* of the substance to the shadow, it is only too glaringly palpable how the situation became reversed through the ascendancy of developing but emotionally controlled intelligence.

Before we go any further, however, it will be necessary to commence with the word religion itself. For the fact alone that there is no such word or its equivalent in any one of these languages or dialects, that is, in the sense in which all civilised nations employ it, is at least extremely significant,—not merely as showing the extreme simplicity and primitiveness of these natives, but as very forcibly demonstrating that no such idea, or even thought tantamount to it, ever occurred to them. Because, too, the ancestral worship or veneration of their fathers, which to them was as natural as eating, drinking, sleeping, and procreating, had been derived from Nature, simultaneously with those other basic instincts of preservation and reproduction, so that from the very commencement the entire matter was an integral part of their actual existence, therefore in every sense natural and personal, and one of associations, pure and simple. Indeed, the entire principle which was at the root of ancestral worship, so-called, was that which emanated from the radical and social instincts, more especially those of suspicion and fear on the destructive, and confidence and veneration on the constructive side, that resulted in the very natural and personal desire, on the part of the individual, to adore and to be adored. That these basic instincts were primarily responsible for the veneration of the father in the flesh, *i.e.* for the first outward expression of man's



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homage to the generator and begetter of his own person, is reasonably admissible. Indeed, judged according to the existing patriarchal conditions of these natives, to whom the father is a law unto himself and his people, and the person of the eldest son, as priest to the family, is sacred, there cannot possibly be any doubt whatever on the subject. It is quite evident, then, that this primeval adoration of the father in the flesh, combining, as it subsequently did, with a belief in the existence of the soul or spirit, developed first into the worship of the father in the spirit, and, later on, into that of certain deified ancestors, which, co-operating with a belief in the phallic principle, eventually arrived at a worship of the Supreme God, from whom the origin of all life was traced, and here, so far at least as these natural philosophers are concerned, it culminated.



## CHAPTER IV

### PROVERBS AND FABLES

It is related of a certain Ibo chief, that he was one day talking to a foreigner, when the latter suddenly told him that his country was very bad. Pausing for a few moments, and looking as if he was in silent soliloquy with his familiar spirit, the former in a very decided and deliberate manner replied :—

“Do not say that my country is bad. Can the earth, or trees, or mud walls speak?”

“No,” answered the stranger, “not, at least, that I know of.”

“Very well,” continued the chief, “never speak badly of the country again, but should any of its inhabitants offend you, accuse them directly.”

Some time after, it happened that a great misfortune befell this philosopher, owing to the intrigues of certain enemies whom he had made, so to commemorate the event he purchased a slave, to whom he gave the name of “Madu-wu N'dso ala,” which, interpreted literally, means, men are the wickedness of a country. It is not my intention to do more than make a passing comment on an example such as this, which in reality speaks for itself; but apart from the natural equity and justice that is here expressed, which by the way has for civilised ears a certain ring of familiarity, from a native standpoint we are once more face to face with that peculiar veneration for the land which, as it does in this particular instance, places it even before the person, on the ground that while the activity of the former is displayed in regular

and ceaseless production, such as is beneficial to the nourishment and maintenance of its inhabitants, the excessive exuberance of the latter leans more in the direction of aggression and destruction.

To understand thoroughly the morals, the innuendoes, and the realities which are so carefully and artfully wrapped up in the puny compass of these names and proverbs, the reader must learn to appreciate the fact that even as children the art of talking and debating is a natural accomplishment, which comes almost as readily to these people as the act of eating. For we must remember that the leaders of these natural people rise to eminence in their communities quite as much by talking as through the force of arms—by, in fact, a judicious combination of the two—because one without the other is ineffectual, if not useless. It is equally natural, therefore, that under conditions such as they live in, their arguments, and even their ordinary conversations, should consist practically of metaphor and parable,—all the more so when we consider that their languages have evolved out of natural symbols. So that with them it is not merely a question of beating about the bush to gain time, that the people, instead of going direct or straight to a point, always select the longest way round as being the shortest way home, but simply and solely because they cannot help themselves, and more than this, because it is their natural mode of expressing the very natural and literal thoughts that are within. Indeed, it is with them a second nature, or rather the outcome of that natural simplicity which finds in metaphor an egress of thoughts that are thrown out to form a covering, which conceals those deeper and inner subtleties that are underneath the surface; for, as the Ibo proverb says, "Proverb or parable is the broth of speech." It is not in the least surprising, therefore, that when you ask a native why "so and so," his inveterate enemy, has come to grief, that the only response which he vouchsafes, in reply to your query, is, "Do not give a lame fowl to your neighbour." For, put into plain English, this amounts to, "cheat a stranger, but not a friend," and the inference to be drawn from it is too manifest to need any further remark. Similarly, the only answer that K's

bosom friend will give regarding the cause that has led up to the ruin of himself and family, is to quote a well-known Ibo and Ibani proverb, "Fish that do not feed upon other fish are unable to get proper nourishment." Here, too, while the meaning of the maxim conveyed is much too obvious for explanation, we cannot help recalling to memory that sage piece of shrewd common sense philosophy which is enunciated by the fisherman in Pericles, in reply to his comrade's question, "Master, I marvel how the fishes live in the sea?" "Why, as men do on land; the great ones eat up the little ones."

So, if we pursue our investigations with infinite care and patience, and above all in a sympathetic frame of mind, we will discover that these natives, in spite of their detestably brutal customs, are in the deepest sense of the word more natural and religious than we Europeans are; also, that although their religion is unfortunately more on the destructive side, they are notwithstanding neither so black nor so inhuman as they are painted.

Beggars, as they naturally are, believing, as they do, in the principle that if you ask you may receive, and at the utmost can have no bones broken by a refusal, they are as a rule grateful. Ingratitude, however, is not uncommon, and among the Ibo one of their favourite methods of illustrating it is by means of the following maxim: "When you invite a tortoise to a meal it is no use giving him water to wash his paws with, because he will soon walk on the ground and dirty them." That is, no matter how generously you treat an ungrateful person, he will not appreciate it, for the more you give him the more he will expect and ask for. It is, however, by means of proverbs such as these that it is possible to connect the mentality of the people with those natural emblems or types that have become emblematical or typical to them of certain abstract elements. In support of this assertion, it is more than possible to see daylight in a maxim such as this, which declares that "the son of a tortoise cannot confess to a crime of theft as long as there remains a chance of denial." For a tortoise, small, unobtrusive, and unoffensive as it is, has for these very reasons been to them a mystery, therefore an emblem, typically representative of that natural simplicity

which is only a cloak to hide the deepest subtleties. So, as having first of all been to them the emblem of patience, wisdom, sagacity and cunning, in addition to having given its name to these qualities, it is still typical of a morality which, although it admits that "there is no gain in lying," and is of opinion that "a liar is exposed to the heat of the sun," pronounces judgment on the truth as being only "greater than ten goats," and is capable of utilising every loophole that affords a chance of escape or a safe line of retreat.

It is only natural, too, that with a people such as these the ever-present personal should make itself felt in their proverbial subtleties. What is more, human as they are in every radical sense, it is not surprising to find that they are likewise pervaded with the same passion for material wealth, power, and influence (only on a different scale and in another degree), as our own more civilised brethren. So it is that these human sentiments have found expression for themselves in certain proverbs, and in this manner we get to understand why and how it is that, in spite of those mental subtleties that lie concealed within the duplex folds of their inner consciousness, they come to the conclusion that, from the native standpoint, the maxim "a son cannot first have a son before his father," which upholds the ancestral discipline and authority, is not only necessary but essential, dealing as the elders are obliged to do with a youth that is contumacious and headstrong in the extreme. It is easy to see, in fact, that this maxim has had its rise in a parental snub, administered to a son, who has been too much inclined to take upon himself the government of the household, and whom it was necessary, for all concerned, to put in his proper place.

What, indeed, can be more human, or, for the matter of that, more blatantly modern than this, "Wealth makes the soup taste nice," being, as it is, a maxim that recognises in its full significance the benefits, the prosperity, the utility, and above all the power that can be conferred by riches. So, although a household may be over-developed as regards the sinews which nourish and maintain it, and in spite of the fact that they believe, as we have seen, in strength and multiplied counsel being synonymous, they acknowledge that "a canoe without a



steerer can easily go astray"—in other words, that a house minus a head is as useless as it is powerless.

So, too, how very human and how painfully modern is the principle which recognises that while "money is the cause of beauty," *i.e.* utility, "it also has no end in giving satisfaction." Again, in these two Ibo proverbs, "Money is the source of right," and "A rich man is seldom condemned, for the mouth which eats another man's property is benumbed," it is at once evident that they see in wealth the factor which makes for tyranny and oppression. Not only this, however, but they find in wealth and power a convenient means of intolerance or of the evasion of what is just and equable—a handle that not only provides one law for the rich and another for the poor, but goes even further than this by providing a law for and unto itself, which acknowledges no other, and, to suit its own dark purposes, even over-rides the legitimate ancestral ordinances. For nowhere is might so heavily and so oppressively right, and nowhere do the weak succumb to the stronger, or do the fittest survive, as they do in this enslaved country. Having presumably learnt by experience, they consider that "confidence" in a faithless person in time of trouble is like "a broken tooth." For to trust a tale-bearer or a sneak, especially during a period when two houses are in dispute over some family matter, would be, in their estimation, but adding fuel to the flame, and about as diplomatic as "to expect a goat to suckle a kid belonging to another flock," or, in other words, "to ask a woman to nurse the child of her worst enemy." And it is all the easier to appreciate the meaning of the simile when we know that, in accordance with native law and custom, "a broken tooth" is only appraised at a valuation which differs from the full and original value according to the amount of injury that has been inflicted on it. But full of gloom and weighed down by sorrow as these natives ordinarily are, they are at times equally brimful of optimism; so trouble and misfortune, no matter how heavy it is, must be faced boldly, to the utter exclusion of all trifles. For "is it possible," they ask, "that a man can carry on his head a basket full of elephant's meat, yet be searching for snails with his foot?" A question, surely, which clearly and convincingly answers itself. It is

frequently the case all over Western Africa that an individual belonging to a certain tribe and community is forced either to leave or is driven out of his own country, and obliged to seek protection in some other locality. For, as among all natural people, refuge and protection are always given, and cannot, in fact, be refused, by their ancestral laws, to any stranger who claims them. Should it happen, as it often does, that this stranger, as he is always looked upon, settles down, becomes prosperous, and shows a disposition to interfere in state councils, or in matters connected with the government of the community, the following proverb is very soon thrown in his face, "Nyagu kiri yana akiri digi, tsi bigba na," the literal translation of which is, a plantain tree always takes upon itself ground which does not belong to it. This practically amounts to his being told that he is a stranger, *i.e.* one outside their ancestral circle, and is presuming on the advantages of his position by attempting to put his meddlesome fingers into business that does not concern him. For here, in spite of the humanity of a community that gives shelter to those who have been deprived of their own personal rights and privileges, and who have claimed the ancestral protection of others, it is quite evident that, as regards the infringement of the patriarchal heritage, these natives one and all are peculiarly and particularly jealous. For a heritage such as this is an heirloom that has not only been handed down from father to son in never-failing succession, but it is also believed to have come direct through the gods, from the first great ancestor, and, as being under the control of and dependent on the spirit fathers, it is esteemed as a personal possession, which on this account is all the more reverently venerated and jealously guarded. Because, too, the question of self-interests is paramount even in a community derived, as the various families have undoubtedly been, from the same stem. So it is that one Ibo proverb insists on the principle that "strangers shall not be rulers," while another maintains that "the land is never void of counsellors."

Knowing these people as I do, and appreciating them at their own valuation, it is quite impossible not to see how plainly and faithfully these names, words, and maxims re-echo the thoughts and inspirations of that inner consciousness we



call the mind. So that it is all the easier to understand how the mere mental effort drew its inspiration from and utilised these symbols in order to give expression to all that it felt. No wonder, then, that as these were personal, the words, names, and proverbs also assumed a realistically personal aspect. No wonder, too, that pantheistic as was their conception of the plan of Nature, everything from the earth beneath their feet to the sky overhead became to them a purely personal matter, embodiments, sanctified, as they were, by the tenancy of the spirit element.

Taking some of these proverbs, it is intensely interesting to follow the trend of native thought as we see it expressed in such time-honoured observations as this, "Woman never reigns"; "The corpse of a man is not carried as that of a woman"; "A bad son enters his mother's womb by the back"; "The rain cannot fall on the teeth as long as the lips cover them"; "The eyes and the nose are kith and kin"; "A traveller does not buy raw fish"; "Where there is smoke there is the fire"; "One who is over-cautious of his life is always killed by the fall of a dry leaf"; "A close observer knows the street that is swept by moonlight"; "One who does what he says is not a coward"; "The dog's nose is always cold"; "Everything is with the sick man. If he dies there will be a great demonstration of grief for him, and if he survives there will also be a great thanksgiving to God on his behalf."

The fables are disappointing when compared with the significance of the names and proverbs, except that as throwing an extremely lurid light on the attitude of these people towards animals, as well as on the relationship existing between them; they are, on the other hand, decidedly instructive, yet only illuminating when viewed from a standpoint of all-round knowledge and experience regarding the life and habits both of the animals and the people in question.

#### NOTE

A discussion of the grammatical construction of the various tongues, and the philosophy of words and names, will be found in the Appendix, and this might be read with advantage before proceeding further.



PART III

THE NATURAL RELIGION OF THE VARIOUS  
TRIBES



## CHAPTER I

### A DEFINITION OF RELIGION : ITS SOURCE AND ORIGIN

To get a clear and thorough insight into the characteristics and temperament of a people, it is, I think, essential first to obtain a comprehensive grasp of their religion, even before attempting to master their laws and customs.

Not only is it extremely difficult to define religion, but it is also no easy task to trace its origin and development. To me it seems that all definitions—all those at least which are accepted—are altogether too much involved, if not in many instances beside the mark. The difficulty, so it appears, does not lie so much in the thing, religion, itself, as in the manifold human complications which have grown up out of and around it, that of necessity make its definition all the more complicated. But if we go to work in the right way, by an intimate acquaintance with those barbarians who are still in a natural condition, we can, I think, go straight to the root of the matter, or, at all events, as near to it as is possible.

Max Müller was a very able and learned Professor of Sanskrit, yet his theory, founded as it was on a consideration of the natural necessities of language, and illustrated by the Vedic hymns of the ancient Aryans, conveys little or no comprehensive meaning, while his definition of religion, as “the perception of the Infinite under such manifestations as are able to influence the moral conduct of man,” explains nothing, and still leaves us in the dark concerning a question that requires elucidation. There is about it a ring of artificiality, of pedantic dogmatism, that seems to be altogether unnatural, and which certainly makes no appeal to the purely natural.

Had the learned Professor ever made the acquaintance of these unlettered barbarians of the Niger Delta, he would have quickly discovered that grammar and its rules have absolutely nothing to do with this, the most human, as it is the most vital problem of all—more so, if anything, to the savage than to the highly civilised—namely, the problem of religion.

Essentially a scholar and a Professor of language, Max Müller's whole line of thought centred in one fixed dogma—the unity of thought and speech. Words, or rather the rules on and out of which they had been built up, were everything, and alone appealed to him as conveying the whole mystery of human life. Nature was forgotten and overlooked, almost as if she had no existence, and all theories outside his own ignored.

In criticising all the leading creeds of the world, he concluded, that "the seed from which they spring is everywhere the same. That seed is the perception of the Infinite, from which no one can escape who does not fully shut his eyes."

Here he was quite right, in so far that the seed is identical, and there is no escape from it. Not, however, because it is the perception of the Infinite, but because it is a natural, therefore a human instinct. But to continue. According to him, each race, dimly conscious of the proximity of a power that demanded adoration, expressed its sense of this in accordance with its capabilities, but in a sense that was naturally imperfect. A description of such transcendent ideas as the existence of God and His attributes was only possible in the form of word pictures. Words cast a filmy web of metaphor—a mysterious glamour—around the truths of which they spoke, so by a very natural mistake men interpreted the metaphors for facts. "In the fundamental metaphor is the true key to the riddle of mythology, and in one sense of theology also. . . . The same people who had learned to speak of themselves as runners, now spoke of rivers as runners. The sun darting with his rays was to them a warrior piercing with his spears. The cloud carried along by the wind was a sailor, or as a ship blown across the sea with flying sails. If man could roar, so could the storm; hence he was called the roarer. If man could smash, so could the thunderbolt; hence he was called



the smasher. If man could smile, so could the sun ; hence he was called the bright. If man could measure, so could the moon ; hence he was called the measurer of the sky, the maker or ruler of nights, and fortnights, and months."

As we know, the principal evidence on which these theories were based was drawn from the Vedas, in other words, the earliest known literary efforts of the Aryans, said to have been composed some 1500 years B.C. But ages prior to this date the more primitive ancestors of this noble race had feared and adored these very spirits and their personifications, which, in after times, their more advanced successors, still at a loss for words, however, had specialised as actual agents. For long before they had even given the matter a thought, before even they had developed sufficient intelligence to connect their vague and hazy ideas, religion had made itself felt, and its development had already begun. But it is not in the Vedas, nor yet again in the history of language, that the history of early man and his religion are to be found ; just as it is not in words that science has discovered all her grand secrets, but in the bowels of the earth, and in the finity of the Infinite. Thus we find that the Ibo and other Delta tribes to this day have no written language, and only a limited vocabulary of words ; while the grammar by which this is controlled, and for which no word exists, is extremely rudimentary. Yet who will gainsay the statement that 4000 years, or, for the matter of that, 8000 years ago, when civilisation in Chaldæa and Egypt was at its zenith, their ancestors did not hold the same religious views then as they do now ? So in the antiquity of their natural religion, and in the almost still greater antiquity of their innate conservatism, it is a comparatively easy matter to trace the seemingly lost antiquity of all religious instinct.

If it is true that religion is not a mere speculation, but a matter of the deepest personal interest, it is equally true that much time and thought have been devoted to religious speculation, and it is also a matter of certainty that in spite of this energy, no definite conclusion has as yet been arrived at. In fact, with the expansion of thought and culture, humanity is more divided than ever it was on this, the crucial question,

that would speculate on the past, grapple with the present, and decide as to the future.

Yet, in spite of all this mental activity, we are no nearer the solution, because we deceive ourselves and will not admit the fact that religion, as classified by man into so many denominations and formulas, is a human speculation, that is based on so-called superstitions, in other words, impressions received from and implanted in us by Nature. For denominationalism in religion is practically a question of individual mental attitude—the line of thought of a personality—which is nothing more than a question of temperament. And what, after all, is temperament but the disposition or internal constitution of the individual, which, both in natural and civilised man, is largely composed of a number of instincts and sensations, guided and controlled by the emotions and reason, in a greater or lesser degree, according to the temperament of the individual. Hence, where emotion prevails we have the theologian, and where reason the rationalist. Still, the question of religion, even to the indifferent and seemingly irreligious man, is one of deeper interest than would outwardly appear. For while the right of exercising it is purely one of self-interest, a question that lies between the individual and his ideal, religion itself is a Catholic tendency, derived from and transmitted by Nature—her spiritual embodiment in fact. Judged, therefore, as religion ought to be, by the Catholic standpoint of the universal, so-called “irreligion”—if it exists at all—is merely a question of degree or polarity, dependent entirely on the egoism of the personality concerned, which to some extent is influenced by natural and circumstantial environment.

For the nearer man is to Nature, the closer he is to the unknowable Infinite; and the greater the growth of civilisation or artificiality, the further the distance from the Omnipotent Almighty. In his natural state, it was in man's nature to rise, in spite of the strong animal tendencies that were dragging him down. Not because of his development being a purely moral ascent, a natural effort to establish a spiritual ascendancy, but just as his physical evolution was an ascent from the lowlier attitude of the creature on all fours, to the erect position he now occupies as man on two legs, so his

religious and moral evolution has been a gradual outward and upward ascent. Alone of his kind, and extreme in his egoism, it is only natural that he aspired to a sublimer state, and still more natural that, in the fine frenzy and vanity of a wild and disordered but grotesque imagination, he saw reflected in his own glorified yet characteristically human visage the likeness of the Great Creator.

In spite, however, of his supreme egoism, man, unhampered by the restrictions of social necessities, and unfettered by the restraints and restrictions of creed and dogma, leaned more—absolutely and entirely, in fact—upon God, the unconscious creation of his own supremest effort—than he did upon himself, that is to say, that although he was all the time depending on his own exertions, in imagination he was entirely dependent on the spiritual element.

But as he grew more civilised, man leaned more on himself and less on his God, and, to satisfy his own conscience and the all-absorbing sententiousness of the priests, who required some compensation for meeting the spiritual demands, the formulas and ceremonials of religion were brought into existence, monuments which, although they stood for his own increasing egoism, to some extent at least atoned for the loss of confidence in the Unseen.

No one can deny that in these days of scientific advancement and of art culture, when we are getting farther and farther, as it were, from the source of all things, notwithstanding every effort to probe into the very heart of them, the child is nearer to the Unknown than the man, and the savage than the civilised adult. If this is so, is it not because they are both nearer to Nature, therefore to the source which so mysteriously inspires her?

To start with, we must remember that this word religion, derived as it is from the Latin, is but a mere label, which conveys no meaning beyond the performance of a something binding. But if we dig beneath the surface in real earnest, and see for ourselves what this something in reality is, we find that the performance or binding of it is a purely moral outcome of human exigences and conditions, while the something itself is just as purely and simply an entirely personal matter.

Looking at it in this natural light, it will then appear that religion itself is natural, *i.e.* it is from Nature, pure and simple, so that in reckoning with it we are dealing with a force that is first of all natural, and in a secondary sense human.

For religion is not a mere matter of creed or dogma, but a personal and spontaneous outpouring and uplifting of the emotions from the individual to the Infinite. Because it is one with the sensations—those natural inspirations or impressions—of fear or reverence that so overcome or overawe a man's judgment, when in the presence of an indefinite something that reason, if he would only appeal to it, would tell him has no definite existence. So that whether so-called supernaturalism or those creeds which are now in existence disappear or not, religion is bound to remain, *i.e.* if it is an inherent instinct, such as I have tried to describe. If it is not so, however, then before the cult of rationalism the supernatural will cease to exist. In that case rationalism will be nothing more or less than a reaction, the return of man to Nature, and his supremest effort of reason, in contradiction to his earliest and extremest effort of personal egoism. If, however, Matthew Arnold was right when he said that the kernel of religion exists in emotionally touched morality, or, as I have endeavoured to express it, as being but the natural germ of religion; and if Emerson's prediction, that ethics is to be the religion of the future, becomes an accomplished fact, it seems to me quite as certain that the natural will never entirely vanish. For the germ of morality is religion, just as religion itself has in its turn evolved from the basic germ, from which all Nature is still evolving.

So that there should be no difficulty in tracing the origin of ethics, or in trying to discover at what stage of evolutionary history it became a religious constituent, and, if there is, it is but a self-made difficulty, arising from a misconception of the fundamental principle of religion.

Many ideas have been advanced regarding the beginning of religion, and among many, Spencer, Tylor, Lang, Frazer, and Forlong have formulated theories that, although at variance, verge upon the common centre, with a keen perception of



the merits of the case, yet without in reality touching the bed-rock. Spencer, for instance, who has invested the ancient speculation of Euhemerus with a scientific meaning, is of opinion that the evidence furnished by the life and thought of modern savages is the clearest, as it is the most feasible, guide to the customs and conceptions of our primitive ancestors, yet at its best a crude guide only. Measured by this standard, it is evident to him that primitive man's first conception of a soul was based on his experience of the world that dreams and swoons first opened up to him, and from which he formed the idea that the soul was the life apart, that could roam away from the body and return. Following up this train of thought, man's next step was to believe in the temporary existence of the soul after death, or of its subsequent permanence as a spirit, so that in time it is not surprising that his imagination peopled the various natural elements with wandering ghosts, who acted as the agents of those natural fluctuations that are in constant evidence, both in natural and in human life. It was in his endeavour to propitiate these spirits with the twofold object of either averting their anger, or of securing their mediation, that the germ of religion was founded. But, according to the great philosopher, this belief, while supplying the raw material of religious idea, is not entitled to the name of religion.

Dr. Tylor, while not confining himself to any specific system or method, sees a religious idea in animism, *i.e.* a belief in the existence of a world of spirits, whose active energies are responsible for all natural operations, a belief that embraces three degrees of conception—the conception of human souls, of spirits similar to but not human, and regarded as the active and intelligent causes of natural events, and of deities.

Lang's later theory offers a change of front, being, "in brief, that savages do not, and did not, get their god-idea by way of their ghost-idea; that they seem rather to have a god-idea before they have ghost-ideas; that they probably got it by way of their 'supernormal' perceptions; and that what has happened in respect of their spiritism in general, is a process of intellectual and moral degeneration, though somehow the higher theistic and moral ideas subsist alongside of the

degenerate ones—this survival being, in fact, the ground for the survival of pristine elevation.”

Frazer and others see in the universal traditional worship of trees and plants the most primitive form of religion, while Forlong inclines, on the whole, to attribute a phallic significance to all religious formula and ceremonial.

Now, while it is difficult to decide, with any absolute certainty, as to whether religious ceremonial commenced with a worship of ancestral or natural spirits or tree spirits, or yet again, with the personified powers of procreation, intimately associated, as all of them were, with the thoughts and actions of primitive man, there seems to me no difficulty in arriving at a perfectly sound and legitimate conclusion with regard to the germ, *i.e.* the anterior religion from which all posterior ceremonial has originated, and on which the superstructure we now call religion—in other words, creed and dogma—has been raised and constructed.

This, it seems to me, is a phase of the question which has in a great measure been overlooked, and, therefore, sufficient distinction has not been drawn between the actual base of religion and the superstructure of religious formula. I do not see, therefore, how it can be said that religion commenced with the worship of the procreative powers, or of the spirits, natural, ancestral, or arboreal, although it is quite evident that religious ceremonial must have had some such commencement. Granting, however, for sake of argument, that the first impression of the soul came to man through the medium of a dream, and that this impression developed itself into a more permanent spirit; other thoughts, prompted by instincts and sensations, must have been at work simultaneously with his ideas concerning soul and spirit.

For this natural creature was a bundle of sensations as well as emotions—sensations that, along with certain animal instincts, were abnormally developed, simply because they were in constant use. It seems quite reasonable to infer that, before the idea of a soul or spirit entered into his mind, his emotions must, as a matter of course, have been stirred to action directly through his sensations, and that these came in a no less direct manner from his instincts.



If this be the case (and there can be no rational objection to a connection such as exists between these), we are nearer to, if not at, the root of the whole matter—a matter which is purely instinctive and sensational. Here, at least, we obtain a clue to man's primal conception of the soul, a clue that enables us to grasp the reason of his protoplasmic conception—a clue that is to be traced to sensations, and to the bed-rock of inherent instincts.

We have but to study animals—wild or domesticated—to ascertain beyond a doubt that they not only think, but, in a limited sense, think connectedly. This may be due in a great measure to association, but what, after all, is association but a development of intelligence, or intelligence in another form? But natural man was an evolution decidedly in advance of this; and his mental development, although slow, was, at all events, outward and upward. So that, whether able to express himself or not, his imagination was at work all the time. Whether he was able to define a spirit or not, to him it was a palpable existence, a tangible reality, that he could not see with his eyes, except in dreams or visions, but that he could see and feel through his active sensations; therefore a something whose intentions he suspected, and whose actions he feared, because it was an inseparable entity that acted altogether independently of him, that was, in fact, outside of and beyond his reach. In this way we arrive at the basis, from which, through other sensational and emotional agencies, emanated those thoughts which resulted in primary religious ceremonial.

Suspicion and fear, then, were the primary instincts, the active and motive sensations that stirred man first to thought, and then to action, but they were not the only two. Two other causes were at work at the same time, which, although opposing causes, combined to produce the effect which, of all effects in the history of mankind, has in its operations approached nearer to the laws of Nature than any other, merely because of its natural origin.

Just as every poison has its antidote, if we only knew where to find it, so human instincts and energies are equally balanced; hence it was that the higher instincts of confidence

and veneration, which were also in man, but lying fallow, counteracted the antipathetic effects of forces that, had they been left in undisputed possession of the arena, would have terminated not merely in disaster, but possibly in the utter extinction of humanity. For it seems to me quite reasonable to infer that it is to this dualism, or conflicting principle of natural unity, that nature, certainly humanity, owes her very existence.

But even supposing, however, for sake of argument, that suspicion, fear, confidence, and veneration are only mere sensations after all, can it be denied that in them is the well-spring from which has issued, and still issues, the eternal stream of what we call religion? And further, can it be denied that, while suspicion, on the one hand, exciting fear in man, prompted a propitiatory ceremonial to avert the wrath or to secure the support of the avenging or evil spirits; confidence, on the other hand, inspired in man veneration for his father, and a still greater awe for the procreative power that produced them both, and veneration, in turn, actuated him to a similar adoration?

There was in the beginning no conscious effort, on man's part, to develop any religion. On the contrary, his suspicions and fears, his confidence and veneration, were but the spontaneous outcome of his natural instincts—an outcome of the emotions that he could no more check than he could cease to exist or to propagate.

To suspect the underlying motive of those persons whom he had cause or reason to distrust, therefore all the more of those spiritual entities whom he could not see, and to fear them in the same ratio, was but natural. It was also natural that he should confide in those whom he had every reason to trust, and in a much greater degree, in those with whom he was in association, than in those he could only conjecture about. And it was only when he developed out of this passive state of unconsciousness into one of active consciousness that he realised his position of absolute helplessness, beset as he was on all sides by enemies, human and spiritual. Then it was that the ancestral veneration grew into adoration, and that he looked to the spiritual head of the family all the more for guidance and protection.

Surrounded on all sides by evil, *i.e.* by people who were inimical to him, and spiritual influences, who sought his life on every opportunity, the family looked to its head for protection. But he, poor man, was to a greater extent than his family circumvented by enemies on all sides, and in spite of his skill, his strength, and his prowess, he felt himself powerless in the face of them all. So in his misery he turned to the spirit of his father, whom during his lifetime he had honoured and revered, and to whose spiritual aid, when he was victorious, he at once attributed the victory. But victory did not always shine upon him, for the race was not always to the swift, nor was the battle always to the strong. Therefore it was in these moments that he looked beyond his father to the first or spirit ancestor who had made every one and everything, good or evil. A moment this of supremest exaltation, arising out of the lowest depths of despair. Of supremest triumph also, for the Supreme One had once more asserted his power and given to him the victory.

Having recognised the existence and presence of a Creator, and evoked his aid, the next stage in the process was the formation of a system by which the victory of the Supreme One and his great influence were to be commemorated and kept alive. But in order to trace the origin and early development of this cult, it will be necessary in the following chapters to glance at the history of man's social and intellectual progress, from the dawn of reason through the thoughts and acts of those whose religious and social history we are now discussing.

## CHAPTER II

### A SKETCH OF PRIMITIVE MAN'S EARLY DEVELOPMENT

MAN, in his primeval state, in the crude chrysalis condition which lies between the larva of ordinary animalism and the higher organism of humanity, merging from the shell of the lower instincts and passions into the higher atmosphere of sublime intelligence and thought; man, in this embryonic state, which was still novel to him, was undergoing a natural process, a mental and moral evolution, unknown to himself, which was unconsciously revolutionising his entire nature. The condition of things was still too new and unfamiliar to make him either realise or appreciate the situation, or to enable him to feel the ground stable beneath his feet, so that he was mentally unbalanced and unsettled.

His own new-found intelligence appalled him. The immensity of the situation and the isolation of his own position made him ponder and reflect, while the duality of it puzzled him; for whereas there had formerly been only one world, now there were two. So thought was born and grew, but feeling outgrew reason, as it did speech, and predominated.

But the memory of his former condition still unconsciously threw a shadow, a gruesome glamour, over him, influencing his thoughts and actions very considerably. In spite of all his efforts, emotion, being the older, maintained a decided mastery over thought, so that man could not shake off this domineering influence, that imbued him with a vague feeling of indefiniteness, as well as with the sense of his own shortcomings and weakness; of helplessness too, for he was at the mercy of death in many shapes and forms—human, animal, and ele-

mental,—and notwithstanding his increasing intelligence he was unable to grasp the why and the wherefore of his existence.

Alone of his kind, amid the alternating awe-inspiring silence and music of Nature, it was only natural that her omniscience and might made a deep impression on him. Hence it was that when thought was as primitive as only an infantile intelligence could make it, superstition, or, as I shall hereafter call it, naturism—*i.e.* naturalism—was the very natural outcome of man's primeval environment. For he himself was a part of Nature, and naturism, derived therefrom, was but a combined product of crude thoughts and natural phenomena.

His very life, his very thoughts, inspired or fed by Nature, made man superstitious, *i.e.* natural. The atmosphere he lived in, the air he breathed, physically nourished and mentally encouraged this development in every respect. For with the very air he breathed he inhaled the actual germs out of which his emotional imagination manufactured the tree of naturism.

Intensely impulsive and emotional as primitive man was, always on the look-out, and seeing in every bush or thicket a hidden or unexpected enemy—animal or human—his senses were ever on the alert and his instinctive faculties aroused. So he became to a certain extent shy and suspicious, and the sounds and noises of the forest, the music of the elements, of animals calling to each other, or the wind whistling and howling, instilled into his mind the primary elements of a religion that was evoked through the natural perceptions. To him Nature was the work of something invisible, or something human yet not human, that he could not see but that he could feel, as he felt the wind sighing through the tangled foliage—an invisible presence, as it were a breath or a vapour, similar to that which he felt filled him, and which, on occasions, in his sleep, for instance, left him,—from the natural to the thing that he felt but could not name was but a step, a long and tedious one, no doubt, and from this to a spiritual religion, the third stage in this natural, upward, and outward process of thought.

But although this process was in every sense emotional, it was a reasoning of the emotions. For man was an observer.



With his senses so well developed he could hear and see great distances. The reason of this is obvious. Much practice had developed these faculties. He was always listening with his ears for the approach of animals, upon whom he preyed, also of those that were dangerous to him, for he could not always see, owing to the density of the undergrowth. When he could see, however, he used his eyes to advantage. It was only natural, therefore, that as time went on man became an observer, keen and acute. Nature was his book. Nature, riven by the fiery lightning, convulsed by the deep-toned thunder, broken up by towering mountains, torn by mighty rivers, and shut in on all sides, even at times shut out from the unknown and unapproachable country above. And when he heard sounds other than those he knew, the animal voices that had grown familiar; when he heard the crash and roll of the thunder, the roaring of the torrents, or the gentle murmuring of the brooks; when he heard the sighing of the breeze and the fierce raging of the hurricane,—his curiosity was aroused.

For curiosity is not a mere abstraction. It is an instinct, strongly developed in the animal, much more so, therefore, in man. It is an instinct that was inherent in man when he was an animal, and could not speak. It is an instinct as strongly implanted, not only in those animals who are the most intelligent and who have been longest in contact with man, but in those who are credited with the dullest of comprehensions.

It is not the beauty, it is not so much the greatness and grandness, and not even the immensity of Nature, that appeals to or impresses the savage. Rather is it her proximity to him—a proximity fraught with evil, danger, and death—that fills him with awe. It is her kinship, her oneness, so to speak, with him that impresses him with reverence.

It was not only in what he heard but what he saw around him, that man was an observer. And while in the former, hidden from him, as were the sources of the various sounds, there was if anything more mystery, in the latter there was more of the material. Therefore, it was not only on the face of the waters, but on a grass or shrub-covered expanse, as well as over the leafy and uneven surface of the forest, that he saw stealing, if not as an embodied form, at least in a



materialised if shapeless shape, the wind, or what to him was some vast and mysterious power, a power that could make the smooth surface of the waters smile with rippling motion, or leap and roll like a devouring fury. A shape, formless and immense, creeping over the tall grass in wavy undulations that to him looked as if it were crawling and wriggling, until the grass bowed downwards to the earth to avoid the pressure. A shapeless something that for hours at a stretch, sometimes continually through light and darkness, stealing through the leafy foliage of the great trees, swayed and bent them with its pressure, until large branches snapped, and even the trees themselves fell prone to earth, no longer able to sustain its oppressive weight.

It was the wind, therefore, almost more than any other element in Nature, that first gave man not only an idea of great immensity of power, but that enabled him to conceive a materialised spiritual embodiment, which was too immense and too shadowy to have shape,—therefore, as it were, invisible to him, *i.e.* beyond the power of vision,—yet the actual presence of which was visible to him in its varied actions.

It was the wind searching the foliage from top to bottom, and turning it inside out, that appeared to him as the motive and mighty spirit of the Creator—the subsequent Holy Ghost of the Christian Creed—wooing with balmy breezes and impregnating with rushing tempests the ripe and fecund earth, until it caused her to fructify and bring forth all that lives thereon and therein.

Where the wind came from was, of course, a matter of speculation, the only answer to which was from above. In this way then—*i.e.* when he had, long after, arrived at the stage of connecting his thoughts—he traced the connection between his own soul or spirit, the soul or spirit of the universe, and him who came from above and created all things.

It is evident that Nature inspired man with her own attributes, for all through Nature herself, viewed at least from the aspect of primitive man, naturism lived and had its being. In the thunder and lightning, in the fierce, devastating storm-winds, his mind, awed if not terrified, saw and felt in the

working of the elements the uncontrollable wrath of the angry spirits of the departed. In the snow and hail, and in the heavy downfall of torrential rain, which fell when it was not wanted, and did not when it was, he saw an avenging motive, and again imputed it to other departed spirits. When one of his kith or kin was drowned or struck by lightning, he attributed death to the same spirits, who, in his imagination, infested these as well as all other phenomena in Nature, and who in some mysterious way were responsible for all its operations.

So the sun, the moon, and the stars were to him strange, far-off spirits, while the trees and the groves among which he lived appealed more to the humanity in him, because of the closeness of his association with them, supplying him with food, shelter, and covering. Indeed, if the truth were known, probably there was not a commanding phase or feature in Nature that did not leave its impress on his pliant and impressionable nature.

So it was out of sheer awe and reverence of the mighty elements of Nature that man became a naturalist, and with increasing intelligence his fear and respect for Nature grew deeper and stronger. So too it was that, looking upon her as his first great mother, she became his mentor and friend, his guide and counsellor, and in this way his religion. For all he saw in Nature was all he had to see and to reflect upon, the organic and the inorganic life and dissolution, that which gave and that which took, the preserving and the destructive causes, and between these conflicting forces the process of discrimination (in other words, moral evolution) slowly and gradually developed itself. Thus he saw and felt, mentally and physically, what to him was right and what to him was wrong, but in this early stage of his development all the concerns of his narrow life were, as a matter of course, reduced to personalities. Everything about him, his own human surroundings, the animal and vegetable life, the material objects, and the spiritual elements were all personal. Therefore, in time, those which were grateful or beneficial to him were attributed to the intervention of the friendly spirits, and those which were obnoxious or hurtful to his enemies or the evil disposed.

But although many of the surrounding objects in Nature, most of all, the greater elements, that he was often in touch with, appealed to early man, it was in the animal world especially that his powers of observation centred, and this, if we think of it, was but natural.

True, the trees not only supplied him with food, but sheltered and clothed him, and in a way, as it were, talked to him, and were, so to speak, connecting links between himself and the departed, and between them again and the greater spirit of Nature. But so too were the animals, for they were unmistakably nearer to him than the vegetable. In them, as in the trees, reposed the souls of those who were gone. To them too he looked for food, but with this difference, that he had to fight for and first of all to kill them, until there came a time, long after, when capturing certain of them in their infancy, he learned to tame and then to subdue them to suit his own uses and requirements.

And this fact, that in animals there was not only strength but stealth, and a cunning that frequently got the better of his own, must have exercised a very considerable influence in the shaping of those ideas which afterwards developed into transmigration.

For natural man, even after he had become an agriculturist, was naturally and essentially a hunter,—not altogether from choice, but from necessity. Everything combined to make him so; the nature that was in him as well as the nature that was outside him; the conditions and circumstances, the entire environment that surrounded him,—all the instincts in him were animal. He had to exist; to do so he had to propagate his species, and in order to propagate he was obliged to preserve them.

In those days, much more so than now, it was a time of perpetual warfare, and man was continually engaged in combating with man as well as with animals. It is, however, with the latter that we have to do at present. To fulfil the natural conditions of self-existence, propagation, and preservation, he was always on his own defence and that of his family, and so he became skilful, not only in using his eyes, his ears, and his hands, but in every animal art and wile that he could practise, by utilising not only his own strongly developed

instincts, but by learning from the animals, with whom he was in contact, every artifice and stratagem that he found in them. Yet, curiously enough, it was not the huge and terrifying monsters that he studied most, but rather the smaller and more insignificant creatures, either animal or reptile, whose craft and ingenuity most attracted him.

Yet not curious, but only natural after all. For this fact of cunning being appreciated before size and strength, points to the fact that early man, when he had begun to realise his position, had more intelligence and possessed greater powers of observation than he has ever been given credit for. None the less was he an animal, though an intelligent and speaking animal, reason endowed, but overruled by emotion, which at times obscured his reason; and the explanation is simple. For while emotion was the outcome of an ancient animal organism, of which it was an advancement and development, reason was a new-born faculty, a higher development, in a very embryonic and undeveloped state. But notwithstanding this, reason had increased his intelligence, had enabled him to apply his animal knowledge—that up to then had been restricted by the total absence of intelligent expression.

Thus reason, in these early days, although subordinated to emotion, played for all that a great though unconscious part in counselling, but not in controlling the latter. For emotion was distinctly the controller, yet with reason dimly conscious close by, feeling its way, in fact, through this extremely sensitive organ.

It was not, therefore, altogether to brute strength but to extreme secrecy and cunning that man looked. It was not might that impressed him so much as craft; it was not power so much as skill. Strange as this may appear, we have but to study the savage to find that it is true; and when the fact is taken into consideration that it was reason asserting her indisputable supremacy, there was nothing singular about it after all.

Hence it was, to quote but one example, that among these Delta tribes, the tortoise in their folk-lore occupies the pre-eminent position of king over all animals in the bush, just as we find it occupying a prominent position in Aryan and other mythologies.



This in itself speaks for the intelligence of the early thought leaders, and shows that the germ of science, curiosity, and its right-hand assistant, observation, were even then at work, but it also shows even more than this. It was not man himself—the ego, the individual—who was at work, it was Nature, or in other words, the cosmic forces and energies which comprise what we call Nature, in whose grasp man was but an unconscious and plastic instrument, working out his own destiny, *i.e.* his natural evolution.

So that, if we only look in the right direction, with our eyes and ears open, and compare the various animal instincts with the human, we will find there not two chains but one single chain, each link of which is an instinct, connected right through, without a missing link; a chain that demonstrates, as clearly as do Darwin's structural links, the one connected and continuous evolution, from the germ plasm up to man, Nature's highest effort, *i.e.* as far as we with our limited human restrictions can tell.

It was through the constant contact with animals that man's already sharpened animal wits became more than ever sharpened, through the counselling faculty that was invariably at his disposal when he chose to call upon it. Yet in spite of his great animal knowledge, emotion, through the spiritual mists which imagination had conjured up, blinded his reason to such an extent that he actually saw in them, *i.e.* in his imagination, certain characteristics or powers which had no existence, except in his own mental mechanism. Indeed, if we can but contrive to look upon the human organism as a living but mere machine, and look into its mechanism with the same perspicacity that an expert looks into the works of a clock, the whole conception of man's physical and mental structure, more complex though it be, reveals itself almost as plainly as does the latter.

So, too, if we but possess the patience to trace these instincts, one by one, from the animal up through man, savage, barbaric, and in his most civilised state, we will be merely writing the psychological aspect of the history of evolution, which is, as it were, the other aspect of the physiological.



## CHAPTER III

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATURAL INSTINCTS

HAVING traced religion, *i.e.* religious instinct, to its source, and seen for ourselves the germ out of which it has arisen and continues to arise, it now remains for us to see how it was that natural man, acting under the tuition of an improving reason, expanded and developed these instincts into a ceremonial.

Natural man was an observer, a hunter at heart and by instinct, and an agriculturist only from necessity—the necessity of increased wants and needs that emanated as a direct result of increasing observation and intelligence. Further, this natural state of society, as it long ago existed, was formed on the patriarchal, or personal and proprietary system, each family at first, then each community, being ruled over by the patriarch or proprietor, who, supreme in life, continued his supremacy in the spirit.

Religion—*i.e.* the fundamental instinct—as we have seen, was in man, and he had already felt, and acutely felt (in spite of his innate egoism, and of his being the sole possessor of speech combined with reason) his absolute helplessness and dependency on a power that was outside him and stronger than his own strength. Thus it was that, in the personal and impersonal objects by which he was surrounded, he had seen through his imagination, at the same time that he had felt through every fibre of his body, the outside essence, the shadow form, the soul, the spirit—in other words, the life that animated not only himself, but all Nature.

Thus it was that the patriarch had become first the

spirit father, and then the ancestral deity, and thus in time a worship grew up around those shadow spirits, who, in spite of their enforced departure into the land of the shadows or spirits, continued to exercise, as they had done in life, their patriarchal authority over their families, for good or for evil, as the case might be. Thus propitiation became necessary, in order to ensure or to secure a goodly régime. So one need led to another, and out of imagined necessities grew and uprose a set of customs and a formula of offerings and sacrifices that gradually developed into religious ceremonial, and later on ritual.

But as reason developed and thought expanded, fresh necessities arose and new ideas formed. Of necessity naturally curious, *i.e.* as a matter of instinct or nature, the thought leader was not satisfied with this cult alone, and the question of his origin next became a source of speculation, the observant and reflective faculties making a further demand upon the imagination.

It is indeed quite possible to conceive the originator of the idea, with perception still limited, and constitution essentially emotional, confronted with the task of unfolding the family genealogical tree to the various and now numerous members, retiring into the silence and secrecy of the forest for meditation and contemplation over a question around which mystery had always reigned. The production of a human entity—himself, for example—entailed a certain process of connection between two individuals of opposite sexes as the result of separate energies. Humanly speaking, duality of function in one entity was not possible, at least there was no evidence of it, therefore he could only explain the fecundity of the earth on the same principle.

Yet, amid all this wondrous and virile fecundity, dissolution or death stalked not as a grisly spectre but as a grim reality, an invisible yet inexorable force, the omnivorous God and devourer of human bodies, so that carnal life modified and vegetable life decayed, only, however, to bloom and to blossom once more into vital living things. So the process went on. Death, as it were, gave life, and out of dissolution came reproduction—one long procession, the links in which were death and life, and life and death.

If the son was of the father, the father was of the son, for the son in his turn became father, and the father lived again in the son, in the spirit as in the flesh. Thus, although decay was always in evidence, life was even more in evidence, and, springing from the very core and centre of decay, it became in man's eyes continuous.

It was in this way, as an outcome of the emotions and imaginations, that there arose among the thinking individuals of these natural communities, from out of the ranks of the leaders of thought more particularly, "the Foreteller of Dreams," "the Seer," "the Prophet," "the Talker or Orator," "the Story-Teller or Reciter," and "the Exorcist or Witch Doctor."

It was in this way too—who at least can doubt that knows the idiosyncrasies of these Delta peoples?—that those shrewd and acute leaders lost no time in finding among certain members of their own communities those whose animal instincts were more fully developed, whose systems were more nervously organised, and who consequently were more emotional, therefore more easily swayed and led than others; members, too, who, in most cases, were undoubtedly predisposed to those diseases of hysteria, epilepsy, and maybe mania, which in their eyes were merely spiritual affections or afflictions, *i.e.* possession by spirits.

Thus it was that, long ages since, this ready-made material, the agent—the modern so-called medium—was discovered, and made use of by the more masterful and calculating men. As religious ritual developed, these men—occupying as they did the inferior social position of younger sons or brothers of the patriarch—blossomed into the priests of their rapidly spreading communities, thus assuming the office that had previously been filled and exercised by the patriarchs themselves, not merely by virtue of their own supreme or exalted positions, but first of all, as the first-born sons of their fathers; these new priests in the early, as in the later history of human progress, were the first and earliest opportunists, seizing, as the earlier bird does the early worm, every opportunity, and taking advantage of every thought or act that could raise them to supremacy, and the position of their office to pre-eminence.

Amongst the people whose sociology I am endeavouring to describe in this book, the principle of the dual existence of the real and the shadow life is quite evident, not only in their religion, their laws, their customs, and their characteristics, but in every phase and action of their lives. It is from them that I have traced what appears to me to have been the evolution of primitive thought and religious development. Still in a state of Nature, the process which is now under discussion has advanced them no further than to the second stage of religious evolution, viz. phallic worship, which, however, has been practically discontinued in favour of the ancestral cult.

With the progress from a hunting life to agriculture an improvement and development had taken place in the social scale. The families, or first social units, had increased and multiplied, and necessitated a further extension of premises and a greater area for cultivation. This expansion of the units, as in the previous stage of development, but in increasing ratio, had developed into communities which necessitated greater demands, among which religious and moral principles figured most prominently.

We have already seen how the fundamental instincts, working on man's imagination, through the sensations and emotions, had originated first of all in the belief of a spiritual life, outside and beyond his own material existence, around which he had gradually woven another belief in the spirit control of the departed father, that was begun and continued after death. And we have seen that, as time went on, progressive man had gathered around this article of his faith a ceremonial of sacrifice and propitiation which, in one word, became what we now know as ancestral worship.

But while the instincts and ideas that prompted this belief were developing, other ideas were simultaneously at work, and other principles were forming, first and foremost of which was the principle of procreation.

Here, as near as it is possible to judge, we have the first appearance on the scene of the appointed priest, as sole human guardian of the worship and ceremonial with which he himself had surrounded the procreative principle.



Looking farther ahead, it was in his own likeness—although he did not think so or know it—that he saw the good and great spirit who had created him, and from whom he afterwards traced his origin. The explanation of this is simple. Mystified by his own utter impotence, and terrified by the destructive powers he saw in Nature, man saw in himself a reproduction, a living image of the great spirit, the first father, who had made or produced him. In this great spirit, the creator of all things, “he who came down from above,” he saw in his descent to earth a combination of the male and female energies, which resulted in the production of the first man and the first woman. For by this time certain powers had made themselves felt more than others, and above all were the powers of death and life. Naturally with the former he connected night, *i.e.* darkness, and with the latter day, *i.e.* light, and the sun who gave that light. So that to connect light with what is good, and death with what is evil, was in no sense a difficult matter.

But just as in his own family there was only one head, so the idea of one creator seems to have originated, but as reproduction was not possible without a combination of two different and varying energies, it was a natural conception to conceive the idea of the earth as the offspring of light and darkness—the latter settling down upon the former—and the constant mastery of death or darkness, yet the equally constant recovery or eventual supremacy of light or life. Death and life, or evil and good, alternating, or keeping the balance, in other words.

This exactly represents the principle on which the whole fabric of Delta religion and society is firmly established. Hence it is that the first spiritual ancestor, long since deified, holds the position of God the Creator. Hence it is also that the earth to this day is considered sacred, and offerings of food and libations are made to her as the original mother. Hence too, the fact that father or ancestor worship prevails to this day, and the origin of the expression “father and mother”—now in use to the head of a house or a great personality—but which originally implied the duality of the male and female energies in the person of the father, just as



in the Aryan religion Siva, under the name of Rudra or Maha-Kala, is the great destroying or dissolving power, but as destruction in their belief implied reproduction, so as "Sankara," the auspicious, he is the reproductive power, which is perpetually restoring that which has been dissolved.

Having with such apparent ease and facility satisfied his moral conscience, such as it was, with these two cults of the ancestor and the Linga, it is only reasonable to infer that man ought to have remained satisfied. Yet in face of what is known of the ceaseless activity and interminable continuity of mental evolution, this, it must be admitted, was not possible. Nature from the very beginning has never ceased to evolve, but even in her very fixity of purpose there is much diversity of variations, not only in the organic world, but in that extremely variable quantity, human nature. So thought went on developing, and with its development new ideas and fresh aspirations sprang into existence. For although he was now an agriculturist, living under more improved conditions than he had formerly done as a hunter, pure and simple, man was still of Nature, and it would have been impossible for him to have lived so long without making a practical exemplification of those objects which most appealed to him. Imagination, excited by the emotions and inspired by the surroundings, was still responsible—as it now is—for his thoughts and acts, because the seat and source of imagination was merely an evolution from Nature herself.

Thus it was that his own environment not only made but educated him, not only supplied him with a vivid impression of the reality, but with the reality itself. Thus impressions became convictions, and he saw everywhere, in the objects of Nature, personal objects that appealed to his very emotional nature, because endowed with the self-same spirit that had quickened him into life.

In vegetable, animal, and human life, in the perpetual cycle of birth and re-birth, religious ideas were instilled into him, and moral seed was sown.

In the various movements and changes of sun and planets, in the fluctuations and contrasts of climate—the rigour of cold and the ardour of heat; in the ebb and flow of seas and

rivers, in the mysterious hush and silence, in sonorous music, varying from the sweet warbling of feathered songsters, or the soft sighing of the zephyrs amid the leafy labyrinths, to the deep-toned thunder of the sky and the fierce raging of the storm winds, enhanced as both of them usually are by the splendid illuminations of the arching firmament; in the down-pour of blinding rain, and in the beautiful colouring of the suspended bow (phallic symbol as it became), the religious idea long since originated, grew, and expanded.

In these and other natural phenomena are to be seen, as we already know, not only the beginnings of natural religion, but its later developments, and if eventually these developed into deities and sects without number, into the three hundred and thirty millions of the Hindus, and gods innumerable of other nations, it is but a living and practical illustration of the variations that human nature is capable of.

Intense spiritualists as were—and as still are—these natural people, religion was not, as I have all along pointed out, merely an independent idea or conception of the brain, but the result of instinct—an outcome of Nature itself, of the ideal inspired by her.

To natural man, everything about him was personal and proprietary. In his father he not only recognised his progenitor, but being of and from him, his father was his owner and the master of his fate, as he was the owner and lord of house, land, and all therein and thereon. So, among the Ibo, Tsineke, *i.e.* God the Creator, is, as His name implies, the owner of heaven, *i.e.* the sky; and in the same way, among the Ibani, Tamuno occupied exactly the same position, just as Olorun does among the Yoruba. And as it is in India, among the Hindu, so these people believe that the existence of human beings, although the direct and practical result of two different energies, is all the same an act of creation, on the part of the Creator, in whose hands they are but instruments or agents.

In the same way, the powers of Nature presented themselves to him as so many personal objects, just as a child of our own day personifies a rag doll into a companion, and talks

to it as such, or individualises a stone or stick that has hurt it into an offending personality.

Commencing, therefore, as he had originally done, with the personal objects nearest to and dearest or deadliest to him, as the case might be, he continued to select the impersonal objects, those first of all with which his associations or connections had been most intimate. In this way, for instance, he selected trees, stones, and certain reptiles or animals, snakes, for example, all of which, as we shall see later on, became closely associated with the ceremonials of the two worships, of the ancestor and the Linga—trees being, as it were, assigned to the former, while stones and serpents were utilised as symbols for the latter.

Having once commenced, thought, essentially a motive power, went on moving and evolving. So out of the awe and reverence that man had inherited for the immediate elements, which were one with him in the spirit but above him in the scale of creation and power, he personified them into gods and spirits. Thus the various physical features of the earth, the mountains, rocks, ravines, glens, groves, woods, forests, rivers, pools, lakes, etc. became alive with divinities and demons of all kinds, that soon extended their dominions into the uttermost parts of the earth, the air, and the waters. From this it was but a step to a similar personification of the distant phenomena that surrounded him, but which, being at a distance and seemingly harmless in themselves, excited no awe and little if any admiration. For in the natural man admiration was only extended to those things or objects which to him were serviceable, useful, and satisfying on the one hand, or inimical, destructive, and terrifying on the other. Thus it was that sun, moon, and stars were only taken into a graduated sort of account in his very realistic imagination, in accordance with the degree of intelligence that was engendered in him—which of course depended almost entirely on the nature of his environment. Hence it is that, while among the Aryans and other imaginative peoples speculation soared aloft and ran riot among the starry nebula of the Infinite, these matter-of-fact spiritualists of the Delta—whose mental vision has ever been limited and confined, were obliged

and content to remain nearer to the earth upon which they lived.

That the veneration of the father, and through him of the ancestor, is but a part of the natural process of Nature, is evident to the scientist who has made a special study of animal life. For apart from the affection of the offspring for the parents, even among the wildest varieties, there is also—especially among the higher and domesticated species—a distinct attitude of fear and respect that sometimes remains even when adolescence has been attained. Here, however, the difference between the animal and human kingdoms is most marked, adolescence in no sense diminishing but, on the contrary, increasing the existing veneration of the children for their parents.

It is but natural to infer that the lower the scale of intelligence the less refined and intellectual in comparison is the ancestral veneration. In other words, the more natural the people, *i.e.* the nearer to Nature, the more sensual and animalistic will their worship be.

But that this must exist, even to some limited degree, is self-evident, if we admit—a truth which in reality is undeniable—that this veneration takes its rise, or is at least closely connected with and related to those basic instincts of existence, propagation, and self-preservation that are inherent in every being.

If this be the case, as assuredly it seems to be, ancestral worship in some form or shape must at one time or other, in the history of human evolution, have formed the religion of all primitive and natural people. Indeed, apart from any animistic belief, inevitably woven up as this is with the ancestral, this veneration of the father—merging into hero-worship—is an innate principle, at this very moment in existence, in a greater or lesser degree, in every individual of the human race, irrespective of colour, condition, and environment.

If it be true, as stated, that among the Juangs, a wild tribe in Bengal, no definite worship of ancestors is visible—a statement the truth of which I am inclined to doubt—a total absence of religion might with a very strong show of evidence be affirmed. For if this cult is not universal—a



question that is also open to doubt—it is at least natural. Nay more, it is but the deepest, purest, and truest expression of Nature in her normal state of evolution, which in the direction of the vegetable and the animal reaches the culminating point in her highest effort, the human being. An expression, which, although it is not recognised as such, prevails, even to this day, in a form that is equivalent to a religious instinct among the Christianised and most cultured races of Europe.

It is the fashion of the civilised unit to talk lightly and airily of customs and superstitions as relics of barbarism. Substitute “naturism” for the latter word, as the more accurate and expressive definition of the meaning to be conveyed, and we will find that even among our cultured selves there are many of these self-same relics which are as strongly implanted in us as they were in our primitive ancestors. Not only implanted, indeed, but ineradicable, being as they are inherent principles belonging to the mystic and all-containing protoplasm. But veneration for ancestry and antiquity is nothing surprising when we reflect that the same reverence for old customs, for country, and for ancestry prevail among civilised nations. Is there, for instance, not in existence, even among the lowliest of families in Europe, some relic, a glove, or piece of ribbon, that has been worn, a pipe that has been smoked with, a glass cup that has been drunk out of, a coat that has been worn, a button which has been worn on that coat, a stick that has been walked with, and a thousand other relics too numerous to mention once belonging to and used by the dead, cherished by the most highly civilised and even intellectual people with almost as much reverence and affection as the savage shows for his beloved symbol?

True, the relic is to the former a mere keepsake, and nothing more, and, unlike that of the latter, spiritless, but in the sense that it is a memento of the departed, in the existence of whose spirit the owner in nine cases out of ten believes, it is scarcely any the less a spiritual relic than the symbol of the savage. Indeed, apart from the fact that it is not the receptacle of a mediator, and so not appealed to, it is quite as spiritual, and in many instances as often looked at, in mute



but pathetic appeal, under circumstances that are abnormally distressing yet intensely human.

Chiefest of these relics, however, is the respect and veneration that is paid to men of genius and commanding personality. There is nothing strange in this, however. It is, in a few words, the nature which is in us—one of the strongest links that connect the present with the past, civilisation with barbarism, the animal with humanity, and the lowly germ of life with Nature's highest effort. In this veneration for great and good personalities it is quite possible to trace the original principle that was embodied when the cult of ancestor worship first came into being.

In other words, this ancient cult was the parent stem, from which phallic worship was but an offshoot. A veneration for those powers of generation which, to natural man's intelligence, very forcibly and practically represented the continuity of life in its two principal stages of dissolution and reproduction as the act of the creative spirit ancestor, by means of human agents. Hence the honour and reverence that was paid to parents—to the fathers more particularly—by children, as living embodiments of a vital principle, embodiments that were carried on from father to son, along with the eternal and unalterable principle.

When we consider that the family is the social unit, is in fact the fundamental basis of all society, there is nothing either strange or wonderful in the idea of ancestral worship, or in the veneration of personality in modern humanity. For apart from all the sublimer, ethical, and æsthetic considerations which are an outcome of civilisation, the principle which, as we have seen, is born in us, is ratified and cemented, a hundred times over, by the ever-present and attractive bond of magnetic association.

Here, again, in this feature is to be seen the intense humanity of all religions. For it is not only the mild Hindu or the down-trodden negro—upon whom theologians look with an ineffable pity that is merely disguised superciliousness—whose gods are ancestral, *i.e.* fashioned in their own human image, who are guilty of hero-worship, but equally with them

the Christian, the entire fabric of whose religion hangs together on the personality of its founder.

The whole fact of the matter is that this cult of the ancestor is in us all, regardless of creed or nationality, because it is natural, and there is no avoiding or getting away from it. Indeed even the Christian, say what he will, not only looks forward to meeting those who have brought him into this world, and who have gone before him into the next, but he believes as firmly as does the barbarian that these ancestral spirits are, so to speak, watching over him and his worldly concerns from their spiritual eminence, with a certain amount of spiritual benefit.



SECTION II

THE NATURISM OF THE DELTA

AN EXPLANATORY INTRODUCTION





## CHAPTER I

### NATURAL RELIGION DEFINED AND THE TERM NATURISM JUSTIFIED

To define this natural evolution of religion accurately and truthfully, there is but one word in the English language that appears to me to meet the case, with all its varied radiations, and that word is naturism, embracing, absorbing, and including, as it does, the minutest of details within a compass that is as expansive as it is comprehensive. For not only is it self-containing, but inasmuch as it implies, as it is meant to imply, that nature is the fountain-head and germ from which this natural religion has grown and developed, it is as perfect as any human definition can be; for it combines the probable with the possible, the substance with the shadow, the reality with the imitation, and the internal with the external.

And if ever naturism had, as it were, a cradle, the Niger Delta, with its unique environment, physical and climatic, is that cradle. Not that for a moment do I mean to infer that this locality was in any sense the home of naturism; but what I do mean to imply is that there is not in existence on the whole surface of the globe a more fitting environment for the centre of natural religion than this pestiferous and malarial region.

But this is not the only justification of this evident definition; for on looking into the matter we will find that practically all the creeds which have radiated from naturism—certainly all those of the greatest importance—flourish among these Delta natives with a wealth of self-contained fervour that can only be equalled by the rank luxuriance of the vegetation. For, driven into a corner, as it were, physically

and mentally,—and such a pestilential corner too,—they have literally stewed in their own stagnant juice, and so remained standing, a type of natural and prehistoric humanity amid the advanced and progressive civilisation of the twentieth century.

While naturism, as it exists in the various beliefs of the Delta people, stands for Nature pure and simple, as represented first of all by her four great divisions of the human, animal, vegetable, and mineral, and then by the elements, forces, and energies within her, including even the minutest material objects, animism is its animating principle. In other words, it is the principle which endows naturism with soul or spirit,—its internal aspect as represented in fetichism by objects, in idolatry by idols, and in totemism by emblems,—living or otherwise. Let me select as an illustration of this great stream of religious evolution, with its numerous radiations, the great river of the Delta to represent the cult of naturism, its main channel standing for ancestral worship, its two main branches for fetichism and idolatry, and its network of creeks for the various creeds, which are known as the worships of trees, stones, animals, serpents, earth, fire, water, etc.

This number of creeds, representing as it does a variety of divinities and deities who, like the gods of the Hindus, are practically beyond calculation, perplexing as it may at first sight appear, is not nearly so confusing when the matter is in reality looked into with every care and attention. For, notwithstanding the fact that formulas and ceremonials, guided and controlled by conditions and circumstances, have radiated in all directions, the original religious instincts of ancestral fear and veneration still remain, founded and established, as they are, on a basis that is absolutely enduring. And the explanation of this is simple enough.

For the radiations, local and superficial as they have been, that have taken place have been merely the result of independent and individual thought—an outcome of a system, patriarchal and egoistic as it was, that was based on the will and egoism of the individual. And it was this self-same principle that, in spite of ceremonial radiations, could not tear itself away from the ancestral—in other words, from the inevitable.

Hence internally we have the same main idea, externally housed in different tenements and clothed in a variety of garbs,—the same gods, spirits, and dogmas, with different names and varying degrees of prominence, due in some measure to the position occupied by the various localities and the jealousies and rivalries that had existed among them,—as a result of which it is possible, amid this prolific polytheism, to trace in naturism a distinct species of henotheism in the universal prevalence and predominance of ancestral worship over all other so-called cults. Indeed, irrespective of the fact that the cult is of the tree, the stone, the animal, or other object, the spirit or deity so symbolised is practically in every case the personification of an ancestor. It is therefore not by any means an easy matter to describe in one word these various so-called worships, which are in reality merely branches symbolical of the one central belief. Indeed, only three words appear to me to fulfil the requisite conditions.

The first of these, “ju-juism,” formed from a local word, “egugu,” which has been corrupted into “ju-ju,” meaning an idol, that is, a sacred emblem, is neither adequate nor expressive enough to define and express in one word the various formulas of Delta religion. For, strictly speaking, although it defines the animistic element by which, in the form of some dead man’s spirit, certain emblems are inspired, it is as a rule used to represent merely the emblem of deceased ancestors, who have not even been necessarily deified.

Animism, on the other hand, while to a great extent defining the animistic and essential element, is much too exclusive, inasmuch as it does not in any sense include the extravagant emblemism which, although it is, as its name implies, a mere external and material figurism, occupies an important position as an inspired agency or medium of mediation.

To extricate myself, therefore, from such an awkward predicament I have had recourse to the one word that, for want of a better, most expressively and comprehensively defines the entire situation. For if these natives have any religion at all, it is, as I have endeavoured to describe it, a purely natural evolution—in other words, the religion of

nature: a perception of those natural instincts and sensations that are never at rest, requiring, as they do, some outlet for their emotional energies; an outlet that, suspicious of motive and intent, and fearful of consequences, yet confident, therefore hopeful, of preservation, possibly salvation, propitiates by oblations and sacrifices in one direction, while it venerates by the same ceremonial in another.

That first of all a silent then an expressed adoration, combined with the fear of the father or ancestor, was the first, as it seems to be the natural, basis of all worship, and that man's earliest religious instincts developed from this into a reverence for the mystic power of procreation that was so practically evidenced in their own organisms, and that out of these grew the ceremonials since called ancestral and phallic, is at least admissible. And it is on this same basis that naturism has for ages existed, although at present the former cult, more than the latter, is now in evidence. For it cannot be denied that early spiritualism, just as we find it in existence among the Delta natives to this day, was an anthropomorphic or purely personal matter; and as natural man always felt the ills and stings of life more than its benefits and advantages, it seems only natural to infer that, connecting as he did the spiritual with the human, he first of all venerated and propitiated those personal entities whom he believed had within them the possibilities of doing and working him harm, then mere objects, such as trees, stones, etc., although these of course afterwards also became objects of personal association as resting-places for the spirits of the departed. Certainly, as far as the Delta people are concerned, every single link in their sociology seems to point to this absolutely natural order of events; and the worship or propitiation of animals or objects as being the recipients, also the symbols, of spirits, who were as liable to be inimical as to be friendly, was but the multiplication or extension of individual ideas. These fetiches and idols were, in fact, merely emblematical religious adjuncts that grew out of the one main ancestral idea, which has as strong a hold now on these still natural people as it had on their still more primitive ancestors.

To get at the germ of naturism, however, it is necessary



first of all to get at Nature in all her many moods and varying aspects; and in order to do this and to see her as she is, we must go to the Delta and look at it as the birthplace of these natural men, who, as a unit of Nature, live in and exist on her, as their prehistoric ancestors did before them. And when we have done so, we are bound to recognise and acknowledge that, from a mental and moral standpoint, the savage first and then the barbarian are the two first links in the chain of human existence as it has evolved out of the animal, as this and the vegetable evolved out of the same common protoplasm, up to the present culminating point of the highest civilisation.

Yet it is not in man alone, as we find him at this moment, nor is it in his religion, his customs, his laws, and in all his various idiosyncrasies that the true and perfect exposition of naturism will be found. To get this we must go even deeper—we must go to the root of the matter, and the root of the matter lies in his instincts, and these, to be understood, must in their turn be traced to the Nature in which he lives, and which, not merely by analogy or association, but in visible and tangible reality, lives in him.

To accomplish a result such as this, to see and to understand these natives, we must first of all study animal life as it also exists in the numerous streams and the densely forested swamps and uplands of their native country.

But to get into touch with these natives it is absolutely essential, first of all, to get into sympathy with them, and this can only be done by living in their midst—inside their huts and in their towns—and in this way being in actual contact with the life that is lived by all classes.

Mix freely with the people, see and hear them in the domestic and political concerns of their everyday life, more especially in counsel and debate,—then the student will realise how the moods and aspects of physical nature live and express themselves in all their thoughts and actions. Dilatory to excess in their normal condition, they will put off a palaver or await an event with that peculiarly tenacious patience which believes that there is a time for everything, and that this time or thing will come eventually if only the philosopher waits long enough. But if either the palaver or



the event is one which is distasteful to them, or for which they have no relish, they will wait until the hearing of the one or the acceptance of the other is actually forced upon them.

Sedate, dignified, and self-possessed, they will discuss the question at issue with much perspicacity and acumen, and with an intelligence that displays a shrewd knowledge of human nature. For, simple as they are, with the simplicity of all natural people, as excellently depicted and demonstrated in the humid hazel eyes and the gentle demeanour of the graceful bush deer, mingling with their *naïveté* is the subtlety of the snake which crawls and the leopard that creeps on the unsuspecting prey with a noiseless, velvety stealth that deadens every sound and defies all detection.

Let, however, a disturbing or antipathetic element enter into the arena of the slumbering discussion, let but some discordant note disturb the harmony of the proceedings,—which are being conducted with the gravity, composure, and decorum of the House of Commons,—and if ever the student has seen a tornado burst upon an atmosphere of abnormal stillness, he will have seen as apt an illustration of a quick and sudden transformation in the human passions as it is possible to see in any portion of the universe. For a change of temperature in these barometric people is quite as sudden and as unexpected as the thunder-tongued and lightning-illuminated tornado. To apply a modern expression which is distinctly applicable to them, they are lightning artists who jump from the quiet and impressive dignity of decorum to the fierce impetuosity and excitement of pent-up emotions in one single bound. Indeed it is extremely difficult at times for a critic to reconcile himself to the idea that he is not dealing with two absolutely different races of beings who are apparently as diametrically opposite to each other as the two great elements of water and fire. Association, however, soon disabuses the mind of any such idea, and the critic finds that they are in reality one people, who are perfectly natural, but extreme dualists—not only as living a dual existence, in the flesh and in the spirit, but as being double in every sense and characteristic—that is, human as well as animal.

But the student must see them in the dense, dark forests of their native soil, hunters and bushmen to the backbone. Then he will find it also possible to understand how natural it was that man became a hunter and so got into immediate touch with animal life, and that having, as he had in the primitive prehistoric days, only the crudest of weapons—his own eyes and hands, a sapling, and some stones to begin with—he learnt to fight with all the snare and artifice of an expanding intelligence. Living at constant warfare with the animal and reptile life all round him in the dense bush and in the treacherous quagmires and streams, pitting his craft, as he did, against their cunning, man's own natural wits and senses were sharpened and quickened. So that, among these Delta natives, analogy and environment have but strengthened or developed those inherent animal instincts which, in their concentrated and abstract form, we speak of as the wisdom of the serpent and the gentleness of the lamb.

There is little or no transition from the chase to the sterner conditions of war, for whether these natives are fighting against the animal or their own species, they do so on identically the same lines of stealth and cunning, the only difference being in degree, and a greater exercise of intelligence and consequent sharpening of the subtleties of the faculties when opposed to a higher form of intelligence than that of the animal.

To see these people, as I have seen them, both in the chase and in war, is to see the man transformed into the animal and the reptile, creeping and crawling through the bush, at times like the agile leopard on all fours, at others wriggling on the stomach snake-like, and yet again climbing trees with the agility of monkeys, or shuffling along after the fashion of the active but ungainly gorilla, intent on one thought only, and that to accomplish the death of the enemies against whom they are contending.

It is only in the possession of animal or natural instincts that it is rationally possible to explain such inhuman but not unnatural customs as human sacrifice, which in its literal sense is purely and absolutely a religious ceremonial that arose in the first instance as an act of grace and submission

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on the part of the human being to the ancestral spirit as meeting the demand of a spiritual requirement—the menial and servile offices of the personal attendant and the companionship of a kinsman—by sacrificing the body to release the soul

## CHAPTER II

### THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT: ITS MENTAL AND MORAL EFFECTS ON THE PEOPLE

THE reader will have already gathered from my previous description of the physical features, that it is not in any sense of the word an environment that tends to exhilarate and elevate the physical and the moral standard of its people, but, on the contrary, that the effect produced is rather to demoralise and devitalise.

To understand this it is essential to experience the climate, so as to watch its effects upon the country. This, which along the coast-line is only a narrow strip of alluvial mud swamp, riven into a network of creeks and channels, merges, as we have seen, first of all into a low-lying flat of swamp and virgin forest, intersected by streams and rivers, and higher up again breaks into hills, still clothed with forests and well watered—a country of moisture, marsh, and malaria, inviting a torrential rainfall, and typical of that moral malaria, that devitalising force of Nature, which saps the physical and the mental organism. That the life, vegetal, animal, and human, of a locality so intimately bound up and associated together, as all three of them are, must be, and is, very considerably influenced by the physical characteristics and features of its environment, and that this in turn is altogether under the influence or control of atmospheric conditions, no one can doubt who has watched the effects of the latter upon the region of the Niger Delta, as well as upon the different varieties of life which it sustains.

Watching all these closely, two facts which will make a

very great impression on the student are : (1) the ceaseless and eternal activity of the forces of dissolution and reproduction ; (2) the experience that one of the chief agents in existence, of either variation or change, is climate.

Looking at the whole matter through the focus of these two main elements, it will be evident to him that while dissolution is accountable for, or at least assisted by, reproduction, the climate, as a destructive factor, is in a great measure responsible for dissolution.

Divided, as the climate practically is, into two seasons, the dry and the wet, the one an extreme contrast to the other, it is possible in this contrast, apart from deeper and more metaphysical considerations, to trace an influence so remote that it has long since passed into an inherited tendency. For it is an influence which makes itself felt not merely in a physical sense, but it is a dominating factor in the mental and moral arena of delta life. Indeed, this element of contrast divides the yearly routine of the people with the same marked effect as it does the natural surroundings. Thus it is, that while the rainy season is to the agriculturist the benefactor in the form of the god of crops, the giver to them of good harvests, the dry season, when water in the interior becomes scarce, is the inconsumable demon of drought, who would if he could prevail over the rain god—this order being just the reverse to those tribes who live by fishing.

For during the dries everything of utility and beneficence is, as it were, taken away, and Nature and the sacred mother earth are at their worst. This, of course, is due to the countless and thirsty drought demons, who, with a thirst which is inconsumable, drink up all the moisture, so that the streams run low, the rain-fed water holes shrink to puddles, the green juicy foliage shrivels, and the earth herself gets baked, and parched, and hot. So hot indeed, that the very animals and reptiles slink away before it, while the natives, half-drowned and steamed, as they have been, in the vapour bath of Nature during the rains, absolutely shrink within themselves under the natural baking process, hiding themselves away underneath the shade of the largest trees from the all-searching sun. So it is too, that, looking as they do on this season as a period of



repose and entertainment, they rest by day, and acting, as it were, on the rebound, fling themselves with all the energy and abandon that they are capable of into the entertainment of dancing and feasting during the cooler hours of the night.

It is not only the sun that is responsible for the intense dryness, but (in addition to the ordinary mists which prevail in the morning and at night) the harmattan (smokes is the local name), a dry cool wind that blows from the north, presumably off the great Sahara desert, prevails for a period of two or three months, or practically during the dry season. Pervading the atmosphere with fine dust, giving it an appearance of haze and gloom, these smokes, extending steadily from one direction, without any apparent movement or cessation, parch up the human skin, wither vegetation, and in fact dry up everything that they come into contact with.

But bad enough as this is, it produces effects that are even worse. For while rendering all surrounding objects obscure, it dulls not only the eyes but to some extent the senses, and acting through these with a distinctly conscious sensibility, it most indubitably affects the emotions and the temperament.

It is not, however, the intense dryness and the unnatural coldness of this atmosphere which are so trying as its perpetual stagnation and absence of all movement, as well as the aching feeling of obscurity and the sensible pressure which it produces on the human system, physically and mentally, both of them factors that are unmistakably agents of that ceaseless element of unrest and change which we see in the countless variations of natural evolution.

Then, with dramatic suddenness, in the month of April or at the end of March, perhaps, see a tornado, like a fiery thunderbolt let loose, fall flat into the very midst of all this strange silence and stagnation. Look out upon the scenery, dry with fine dust and almost obscure because of the smoke-like haze of this erratic air-current, and watch (with a heart awed by the might and majesty of a power unseen but felt) the mysterious approach of the death-dealing but life-giving tornado god, concealed by an avalanche of clouds, that look as if they were about to fall and crush the fragile earth below.

Watch his oncoming onslaught, as the sky gradually deepens

in gloom, and before you have even realised it a change has taken place. Silence and stagnation no longer exist; for before the impetuous rush of the deity, whose voice is thunder, whose deadly weapon is the lightning, and whose most dreaded and destructive element is the wind, that drives all before it, these impotent or rather passive forces, which have had it their own way for so long, have fled in ignominy from whence they came.

Silence and stagnation have indeed departed, and in their place the mad and fierce usurping wind is blowing in furious and uncontrollable gusts through the gloom-laden forests, swaying to its mad wild will the hoary giant trees as if they were merely weeds or puny blades of grass, lashing at the same time the turbid waters of the rivers into a fury almost as indescribable as its own.

But now this great storm god is to be seen in all the glory of riotous elements let loose, the electric element overhead running riot in vivid streaks of living fire, like fiery sky serpents, over the cloud-covered vault, to the magnificent accompaniment of his own sonorous thunder.

To understand this grand and glorious display of the stored-up power of natural forces, so as to realise the effect that in process of time it has gradually and unconsciously produced upon the nature of the natives, it is necessary for the student to watch the storm up to the climax when the aerial reservoir overhead bursts, and falls in one vast deluge on the cowering, shrinking earth below, and her still more naked and helpless humanity. And if he watches further, until the storm has spent its fury, which it generally does in from half an hour to an hour or sometimes longer, he will find that the storm god takes his departure as suddenly as he makes his appearance, and that, although he is succeeded by a calm, it is not that of the stagnant demon, whose unrelaxing grip leaves a mark upon the people which only death can efface.

Let the student wait two or three months longer, until June, and from then into October, and experience a rainy season in the Delta. Then he will see the ground, which had been baked as hard and as dry as the inside of an oven, resembling as it does a dried-up sponge, drink in the rain-water,

which descends in one immense steady downpour and in one long stretch of hours, that pay no heed to time, until the almost dried-up streams swell into foaming, rushing torrents, which carry all before them, while the surface of the country becomes not only sodden, but satiated, by the continuous and humid embrace of the clammy rain-god. Here, in a personal sense, it is possible to trace to one of its manifold sources the inherent dualism that is to be seen in every element connected with their inmost and outmost sociology.

Before concluding this chapter, however, it is essential that the reader, in order to lay the foundation for a subsequent comprehension of the entire question of their religion, should previously learn to understand the conception of the people regarding beauty and the beautiful.

It is in no sense surprising that, from a civilised standard, they have no refined conception and very little perception of the beautiful. For with them, brutally literal as they are, a thing of enjoyment rather than of beauty is a joy that is only a joy so long as it lasts, yet before it can be an enjoyment it must necessarily combine utility with substantiality. The mere abstract pleasure must, in fact, be the result of association or contact with some object that is useful as well as satisfying. For it is an abstraction which, even though it may apply wholly to the spiritual and religious, is derived essentially from those instincts of Nature which are fundamental and purely physical in their sensations and operations, and which, even in the highest flight of conception, natural as this is, cannot throw off the grosser materialism of Nature, pure and simple.

Not that I mean to imply that they cannot discriminate between the refinement and spirituality of pure beauty and the dross and bestiality of sheer ugliness, for they can and do, after a fashion that is crude and degenerate; but their standard of the beautiful, either from a physical or moral standpoint, is not only not elevated, but in every sense on the dead level of mediocrity.

So it is that, judged by the standard of civilisation, these natives are distinctly wanting in a keen sense and appreciation of the beautiful or sublime, and in the same way, too, it is because their existence has been one perpetual conflict with

Nature that they have in so marked a manner developed the appreciation of the useful and the substantial. Hence only utility appeals to them in the sense of beauty. Not only is their standard of beauty, however, considerably lower than that of civilisation, but altogether different. Thus, for instance, while the European admires grace, suppleness, and carriage in the female form divine, a native of the Delta has no eye for curves, but only for a figure that is solid and substantial, and which has, in fact, been gorged with food almost to the bursting point. The beauty of youthfulness in a woman appeals to them in a greater measure than the beauty of a maturity which has done its work or is past its prime, but this again is from the standpoint of utility. For the woman who is a mother is highly respected and honoured, and valued accordingly ; but the woman who is barren or who ceases to reproduce except by virtue of wealth, influence, or personality, holds no place in their esteem. Indeed, in the extremely old and aged they see no beauty, and with certain patriarchal or influential exceptions, they often lose all feeling for them, because they consider them to be a burden and no longer of any use.

But to these sons of Nature, living as they do a self-imposed life of dual existences, there is in their outlook on beauty a deeper significance even than there is in the satisfaction which is derived from mere association with what is useful and substantial ; for to them it is in rest and restfulness that most beauty lies, because there is also a sense of utility in it, of sacrificial offerings that are, as a matter of course, attached to the cult of adoration, which is as much an ancestral right and privilege as it is an essential to the state of rest, that is more keenly appreciated than anything else in existence. For although inaction, and not action, which is due primarily to climate and environment, is the distinguishing idiosyncrasy of these Delta natives, a factor which, like their conservatism, is not a mere growth of centuries but of the everlasting ages, this desire for rest represents all that is highest and best in their conflicting temperaments.

SECTION III  
THE DUALISM OF THE NATIVES





## THE DUALISM OF THE NATIVES

BEFORE proceeding to discuss the animating principle of naturism, looking at the question, in fact, from its own native standpoint, and taking each successive link in its natural order, it will be necessary to discuss that element of dualism which enters so largely into the temperament of these natural people.

In the first place, there is no such word as, or even synonym for, dualism in existence in any one of the Delta languages; and in the second place, it is quite a certainty that, except parabolically or by way of illustration, it would be a matter of difficulty to explain its meaning in a metaphysical sense to the natives.

Yet, although unconscious of the fact or of the very existence of dualism, they are dualists to the core, and their polarity is a conscientious, inevitable, and conscious effect or practice of ancient and time-honoured beliefs; and this inevitable antagonism of separate and counteracting powers is to be seen, not only in their thoughts and actions, but in every phase of an existence which, divided as it is into the human and the spiritual, is absolutely and positively dual.

One point, resting although it does on a mere tradition, is deserving of attention, and that is the fable of the two sons of the first divine ancestor, one black and the other white, whose interests at the outset appear to have been opposed to one another. For, in spite of the fact that it is different in most respects from the Egyptian myth of Osiris the Bright and Set the Dark, who were constantly at war with each other, and the Huron myth of the two brothers, white and black, rivals (as they were) struggling for supremacy, it is identical in

principle. Impossible as it is to get any information on the subject, or to induce any intelligent deduction from the natives, there is more in this myth than meets the eye. Indeed, apart from any implication of far-fetched or abstruse moral principles regarding good and evil in particular or polarity in general, my belief is that, if it were only possible to arrive at the source and origin of the myth, it would also be possible to explain the otherwise inexplicable and inherent antipathy between the white and black races. A rehearsal of the myth in full will, however, explain this feeling better than mere hypothetical deductions, and as the Yoruba version is the most elaborate of all those which were related to me, I have chosen it in preference to the Ibo, which, however, is very similar to it.

It is said that the supreme God of heaven made a small spot below the sky, which he covered with clay. On this spot he brought forth a man and a woman, who begat two sons, the elder a black man, the younger a white man. One day the Creator let down two bags or parcels, one large and the other small, as presents to these two sons, the choice of which was to decide their future destinies. The elder having the first choice, naturally selected the large one, which on opening was found to contain agricultural implements. The younger, having no alternative, took the small bag, which on being opened contained money. Hence it was that ever since then the black man has been destined to earn his living by the sweat of his brow, while the white man was blessed right away with money and with wisdom.

It is not, however, in their laws, any more than it is in their customs and religion, that we are to look for dualism in these Delta natives. It is not in any one particular phase of their characteristics, but in them all, that we will find the dual nature of these natural people. Glancing at their religion, for instance, they have, as we shall see, neither a heaven nor a hell. The next world to them is but a continuation of this one, to which good or bad, rich or poor, high or low, all go, without favour or distinction, irrespective of conduct, class, kind, or degree. Rank demagogues and Socialists, in a certain limited sense, it is a question of equilibrium—the evil have

as much right to the next world as they have to this, or as the good have. In the same way the poor have the same right to it as the rich, just as people live in this world, so they live in the next. Good, of course, as a moral principle, is good, but is no better, certainly no stronger, than evil, which is from the same natural source, for it can neither outlive nor suppress it, even in the spiritual world or the natural element; and as it exists in man, in his thoughts and in his acts, there is no getting away from it, inevitable and incomprehensible as it is, therefore all the more to go unquestioned and to be tolerated.

This very important fact of the non-existence of a heaven or a hell, showing as it does that the natives make no striking contrast between the good and the evil, contradictory though it may appear, is evidence of their dualism, while it does not either detract from or diminish the moral sense, which is controlled—as we shall also see—more by present than by future fears. For, apart from the other considerations, it shows that they accept—as without a doubt they do—the unavoidable experience that in spite of all individual or combined efforts there are always two sides to every question, two ways of doing a thing, or two directions in which a man's energy expends itself, namely, the right and the wrong, the latter being quite as inevitable as the former.

Indeed, looked at from their standpoint, no matter how much a man may try to do the right, the right in the opinion of others is certainly not the absolute, irrefutable right that can stand its ground, without either question or argument. Circumstances may prove too strong for the individual, and lead him into the wrong channel, because, although there is much of the element which is called good in the world, it seems as if the evil were more active, certainly more in evidence, leading men astray with an energy that is simply irresistible, and giving them no choice in the matter.

Yet, according to their ideas, the only explanation of all this incomprehensibility is that every question has two sides to it, just as every level has two balances, which are seldom if ever even. To begin with, weighed in the universal scale of adjustment, life has death, present existence has this world,

the human, and the next, the spiritual. To every positive there is a negative, and every force has its energy. If two men try to get the same thing, the first pulls it in one direction and the second in exactly the opposite, therefore if one is in the right the other must be in the wrong, although both have started with equal rights or claims.

In the same way it appears to them that a truth and a lie balance each other. Indeed, a lie at times is just as necessary as the truth—*i.e.* it serves a purpose, and as such is in fact the truth, just as the truth is equally a necessity. For they are merely the extremes of the same element, which run in opposite directions from one common base or level—a dead level of negation, in fact, limited at one end by truth, and at the other by what appears to be its exact antithesis, but which is only the counterfoil which preserves the balance.

Balance (in other words, polarity) is in fact the pith of their philosophy, and it lies in a nutshell. All life, and all that makes for life, is good, and all death, or dissolution, as well as all that makes for dissolution, is evil; but as life proceeds out of and cannot exist without dissolution, just as light emerges from darkness, so good cannot do without evil, and right cannot exist without wrong.

So too as regards their deities and their spirits. Good and evil are, to all appearances, hopelessly and irretrievably mixed, but in reality no more so than they find all active elements to be in nature, human and animal. Taking a few of the latter for example, the dog, and perhaps the goat, will on one occasion lick the hand that feeds them, while on another day both of them will, without hesitation, show marked and undisguised hostility towards it.

Among the human elements, a man's mother has affection for him, and his father is possibly in sympathy with him, but his brother and his nearest friend he has good reasons to suspect; while one of his wives, upon whom he has lavished all his affection and much of his substance, has been found guilty of infidelity.

Evil has the upper hand perceptibly, and weighty circumstances altogether out of his control have tilted the balance in the downward direction. His most heartfelt wish is to be at



peace with all men; but they will not be at peace with him, for their hearts as well as their hands are against his, so acting purely and simply in self-defence, his heart and his hands are of necessity against theirs. Indeed, frequently he is compelled to take the law into his own hands and do evil, to prevent or to forestall the evil that would be done to him.

To sum up the whole question, it is evident that one of the earliest results of naturism, as regards these natives, *i.e.* of the many effects which the ever-present and all-embracing cause, Nature, with its operating elements, exercised on the minds of natural men, was to make of them, working although it did in an unconscious manner, conscious balancers or dualists. For just as Nature to them is quite incapable of unity or of one sustained effort, as light, for example, is unable to maintain an uninterrupted supremacy over darkness, so they find themselves equally incapable of a prolonged effort in one direction, because of the inability or incapacity of their mental and moral emotions to sustain the strain of an uneven balance.

According to their very natural ideas, these operating factors of Nature were brought into existence by God the Creator, as counter-balances, as it were, of certain attracting powers, such as rain and light, for example, against the repelling energies of drought and darkness. But it is in their own personalities most of all that they see and feel this dualism. For in the production of one human or animal entity—one life, in other words—two factors of opposite yet attracting forces are essential; for neither of these energies representing a so-called unit, which is in itself powerless to reproduce its own species without the co-operation of the other, is even in all its other physical and mental characteristics merely an organism, in which these different features either oppose or balance each other.

Measuring up the question in its entirety, from every possible standpoint, this conception, resulting, as we have seen it did, in phallic worship, is all the more plainly evident among these Delta natives, in the entire absence of any existing worship on their part of those higher natural objects, such as the sun, the moon, and the stars, or any ceremonial connected with them. This in itself points to the deduction that

the idea of dualism was inspired by a knowledge of the opposing or balancing principles of procreation, in preference to the absolutely impersonal inspirations that may have been suggested by light and darkness.

So that we can safely conclude that even in such an abstract question as this, personal association occupied a greater share of natural man's attention than the more distant and less known factors of the impersonal.

SECTION IV

SPIRIT LAND AND SPIRITUALISM



## PRELUDE

BEFORE proceeding to examine the various forms and channels into which the naturism of these Delta people has flowed, it will be necessary to obtain a thorough and comprehensive grasp of that *spiritualism* which is the vital principle, as it is the distinguishing feature of all Delta religion.

In using this word "spiritualism," I do so advisedly and in its most comprehensive sense—*i.e.* a belief in the existence of a world outside of and as opposed to the material, to which the souls of people who have lived in this world are bound to go, but not entirely irrespective of circumstances or conditions.

That, in connection with these natives, I am justified in using this broader and more catholic signification in preference to the narrower and contracted term of demonism, the following pages will in themselves bear sufficiently conclusive testimony. Even animism, which is undoubtedly an expressive word, is not sufficiently comprehensive, or at least does not altogether express the full and literal conception of these natives regarding their belief. For, as we shall see, to them the whole conception of this animating or vitalising principle rests entirely on the question of embodiment, which, when human, is known as the soul, or when confined to other forms of matter, or to the natural elements, as the spirit, disembodiment still implying the animating principle, but a unified and entirely evil aspect of it.

From the very outset this unfortunate dualist, living as he does a twofold existence—in the flesh and in the spirit, harassed in his own person in this world, and also tortured in his mind by his anticipations of the next, is a living contradiction, and not so much a human being as a natural



organism of conflicting principles and characteristics. For while he is first of all a humanist, he is equally so a spiritualist, because although to the individual the human existence precedes the spiritual, the latter, proceeding, as he believes it does, from the Creator, or First Father, has always been taken for a precedent; therefore it exercises an incontestable *precedence* over the former, in addition to which it possesses the virtue of mystery, all the more so of unknown and greater powers. So, as we shall see when we read on through the book, the natural order of *precedence* is to these Delta natives the first, as it is the divinest, law, for no other reason but because it has proceeded direct from God Himself in His own person; and further, because they believe that no other power in Nature can either alter or upset it.

Yet to himself, and according to his own line of thought, he is not an anomaly but a man, just as the Creator made him—irresponsible for his actions, because he is a product of energies that are not his own; and as a natural consequence of this, because of his domination by the spiritual element, a principle that is to some extent seen in the word "Atonghoyefa," a name which in Brass is given to men, and which, interpreted literally, means, everything was ordained by God. According to their ideas in fact, life is the growth of one existence inside another—the inner or vital existence within the outer material, the greater and immortal element animating the lesser and perishable embodiment. Hence it is impossible to understand them unless these facts are taken into consideration, and unless the opposing forces of this very natural energy are clearly recognised. These are: (1) an explanation of the soul—its translation to spirit; (2) the sacrament of burial; (3) a description of spirit land and of the spiritual existence; (4) the re-translation of the spirit into soul, and its return to material existence (*a*) into the human body, (*b*) into animal bodies, (*c*) into vegetable bodies, (*d*) into objects.

## CHAPTER I

### AN EXPLANATION OF THE SOUL: ITS TRANSLATION TO SPIRIT

AMONG the Ibo and other Delta tribes the belief in the existence of the human soul is universal. To them it is an active principle that is awake and about when the body is asleep. Further, it appears as a something indefinite and indefinable, an invisible yet to some extent tangible essence apart from, and of different texture to the material body, which leaves the latter during sleep, or for good at dissolution, and returns for disposal to the Creator, who, as such, also as master and owner of all that He creates, has the first claim on every soul.

In reality, to these natural people the terms "soul" and "spirit" are synonymous, in spite of the fact that they have a separate word for each—"Nkpulobe" for the former, and "Moa Moa" for the latter; for although they recognise a difference between the two, it is merely a difference without a distinction. This difference is best defined by the position occupied, being the soul when confined in the human body, and the spirit when at large, or when confined to an object or an organism outside the human, the actual texture of the essence being the same, irrespective of its situation. The meaning attached to the word is, in fact, that of the living or life-giving essence, *i.e.* the essence which not only gives but which is life, and which also gives a man that intelligence and reason which raises him above the brutes.

Applied to the rest of creation, this self-same airy-breath essence pervades animals and plants, differing, however, in degree. For just as God is higher than man, man is above the animal, and distinguished from him by virtue of his expres-

sive intellect; and the animal is also above the vegetable. Similarly, the latter is distinguished from the material, which is absolutely soulless or spiritless, unless specially spiritualised by the presence of some human spirit-soul. But even matter is animated by an animism which is common to all Nature—that, however, merely imbues it with a state of unconscious and passive torpidity, a state which is best illustrated by the condition of the human body in good health, when the soul leaves it for some spiritual purpose.

True, these definitions cannot always be explained or even communicated by barbarians, but in their own dense way they can appreciate and discriminate between them all the same.

In order, however, to give a clearer and more faithful description of this belief, and the idea of its conception as it prevails among these duplex sons of Nature, I will endeavour to describe it as nearly as possible in the language of one Odinaka Olisa, an Ibo of the interior, whose name, by the way, meaning, as it does, the hand of God, is, to say the least of it, suggestive.

“We Ibo, living in these parts, all believe that inside the body of every man is a soul, which we call ‘Nkpulobe,’ and that without this soul a man cannot live. This soul is a thing that people cannot see or touch, but a thing which they can feel. It is without form or substance, such as a man or animal has; and we believe that all souls are of one kind, and that each person has not more than one soul. This, our forefathers and the priests have told us, does not die, and it seems to us to resemble something like a shadow, or the wind, or perhaps the breath. What we speak of as ‘Ndu’ or life implies everything connected with our being, in a state of existence, such, *e.g.*, as growing, moving, seeing, touching, and speaking. In the same way or sense, the soul, we think, is the fruit of the body, or of that organ which is said or thought to feed or supply the body; while the spirit is the living or vital energy of a person, in other words the soul, whose material body has deceased or decayed.

“The reason that the soul does not perish with the body is because it is the only thing which the great Spirit wants from each person individually, so that as soon as the body dies the

soul naturally goes back to God, except in certain cases, where it is claimed by evil spirits. We believe, too, that all souls survive after death, and that none perish, and that when the soul leaves the body and goes to its destination in spirit land it becomes a spirit. As to there being any difference between the soul and the spirit, we do not know of any except that we speak of the former as a soul when it is confined to the body of a man or animal, or transferred to a plant or object; and the latter as spirit when it is not so confined.

“Further, we consider that when the soul leaves the body it is finished with this world, as far as its original body is concerned, and nothing can be done to bring it back again to the same body, although it may be and is reborn again in children. After death there is a certain place in which souls foregather, and where they remain until the second funeral ceremony to the dead has been performed, and while so detained they exist on a kind of leaf called ‘Okazi.’

“When the burial rites are concluded the soul then goes into the presence of the Creator, and after it has been consulted or interviewed by him it is permitted, according to the wish it expresses, either to remain for ever in the land of spirits or to return once more to the world. Even should it, however, select the latter, it must as a temporary measure, that is, until a suitable opportunity arises, remain in the former region, which is thought to be not underground, but in the air, or space, so to speak.

“In spirit land every country or locality is marked out or defined just as it is in this world, so that each town, community, or household has its own allotted portion, to which as people die they go. Thus it happens that when people die in a strange or far-off country, the soul is believed to return to its place of nativity, except in those exceptional cases when, through death by violence, or through omission of the burial sacrament, it becomes an outcast and a demon. According to what we believe, in fact, each departed soul hopes and expects to meet the spirits of those relations who have gone before him. By some the meeting-place is called ‘Agbala Agbori,’ and by others ‘Ama Nri,’ the street, town, or country of ‘Nri’—the family from whom all pure Ibo believe them-



selves to be descended—and yet again, it is spoken of in a general sense as ‘Ama Muo,’ or the land of spirits.”

All Ibo place great faith in the due and proper observance of the funeral ceremony, for they are of opinion that it enables the soul to go to God, and to its final destination, and that without this sacred rite the soul is prevented by the other spirits from eating, or in any way associating with them, and, in this manner, from entering into the Creator’s presence. So in this way it becomes an outcast and a wanderer on the face of the earth, haunting houses and frequenting burial-grounds, or is forced perhaps to return to this world in the form or body of some animal. Among the souls who are obliged to return to this world are those belonging to men who have died unnatural or violent deaths, and whose bodies have not therefore received the funeral obsequies. A man who commits suicide, for instance, irrespective of the manner or the means, is denied these rites, and his body is either thrown into the river, if one is convenient, or into the bush adjacent to the town; and the reason given in defence of this action, is to prevent a recurrence in their midst of a manner of death which, in their opinion, is unnatural, as being caused by the intervention of some malignant spirit; it being popularly supposed, that if the corpse were buried in the house, or usual graveyard, the spirit of the deceased would most certainly influence the living members in the same direction, besides being, in a general sense, an evil and malignant factor. Apart from the question of any specific ancestral authority, we have in this belief further evidence of the supremacy of the spirit life over the weaker human element.

In the same way, men who are killed by animals, or who are drowned, or in any way meet their death by misadventure, receive similar treatment, as also do men who die from gripe, in contortions, or from any form of malignant or disfiguring disease, such as smallpox, for example, or in fact any one whose body at the time of death is marked with sores, or which is in a state of putrefaction.

In all such cases, those more especially which have been due to unnatural or accidental causes, it is customary to use the expression, that “the deceased died a bad or unnatural death.”



Souls, as a rule, do not appear either to individuals or to a company of people. Apart from witch doctors, only two instances, that were related to me regarding the appearance of ghosts, occurred at Onitsha, both of which, curious to say, were seen in the afternoon. Indeed the belief concerning these ghostly visitants is, that it is only at midday or midnight that they appear, and it is only special doctors who are able to drive them away.

If among savage races, as Dr. Tylor seems to think, there is no clear distinction made between ghosts and demons, it is not because they cannot differentiate between them, certainly not among these Delta tribes, but it is in reality, or in a great measure, to be accounted for in two ways, viz.: (1) the meagreness of the language, and the limited nature of ideas and words; (2) the fact that they are extreme but subtle dreamers, who are not in the habit of expressing all their thoughts.

Thus while all ghosts are spirits, and only those who make it a point or business to work evil exclusively are demons, any spirit, ancestral or otherwise, may be in turn a good or an evil spirit.

Indeed, so intensely human are these sons of Nature, even in their very spiritualism, that the evil and the good, the human and the divine, mingle together like the ingredients in a hotchpotch. It is not strictly correct, therefore, to speak of the souls of the dead as demons, unless we include in the same category all those who are living, and although these from a civilised standpoint are bloodthirsty and brutal, they are not so much demoniacal as simply natural. The departed spirits are not all bad, as they are not all good, and even those who are so disposed, do not commit evil unless provoked thereto by the living. So that the individual spirit rings the changes or the forces of good and evil, according to the treatment accorded to him by his earthly successors.

As far as the Ibo, however, are concerned, the distinction is even more marked, for to them the ghost is invariably a demon, although they do not call him so, *i.e.* he is a wandering spirit, who not having received the burial sacrament, and thus denied admittance into the Creator's presence and spirit

land, becomes an outcast, and a frequenter of houses and cemeteries.

There is another way of looking at this question of outcasts and demons that is deserving of attention. Natural man, believing as he did in the equilibrium of all things, but of good and evil more especially, also believing in Karma, and finding it difficult to account for the persistent continuity of unity from one direction, looked on it very naturally as an evil or antipathetic element, upsetting, as it did, a balance that would otherwise have been perfectly even.

Thus it was that the outcast and disembodied soul, prevented from returning to spirit land, in other words, from resuming his natural functions, became transformed into the demon, because of some uneven act previously performed that, reacting on his own head, prevented his participation in the indispensable sacrament, which had deprived him first of all of his embodiment, and then of his lawful ancestral rights. A deprivation that transformed a dual element, capable of good and evil, into a unit, or repelling energy, *i.e.* an energy that is all evil, and so made him an outcast, outside the personal or ancestral pale.

Two Tamil proverbs, "To the timid the sky is full of démons," and "Demons strike the timid," that I came across years ago, when I was in the Madras Presidency, have always impressed me as being extremely applicable to the Delta folk. For if these people do not actually go in bodily fear of ghosts, they are at all events most certainly oppressed by ghostly fears, are afraid of the dark, will not, as a rule, unless in company, go outside their houses at night, or walk through the bush, which to them swarms with ghostly marauders, but above all, it is the machinations of witchcraft that they go most in fear of. This which represents, as we shall see in Section IX., a diabolical combination of the powers of evil, is to the ordinary Ibo an unholy terror—for every natural man is, as a matter of course, timid, and darkness does not merely afford a legitimate cover for the deeds of evil, but is in itself the power for evil.

As regards the ghosts of deceased relatives or friends who have been known to them, the question of fears depends on the degree and condition of the previously existing social

relationship. Naturally, if this has been indifferent, there is good reason to fear them; but if it has been inimical, the survivors are always on tenterhooks, because there is every possibility of a combination between the ghosts and the malignant spirits—in one word, the active intervention of sorcery. When, as in a case of this kind, the ghosts prove obnoxious or dangerous, the Dibia or witch-doctor is invariably at hand, and if the applicant can satisfy him with a good fee—which, commencing with a few manillas or cowries, ends in a goat or bullock or an individual, according to the locality and the nature of the service rendered—a remedy is immediately provided, which either keeps the ghostly offenders at a respectful distance, merely as a temporary measure, or that taboos them altogether.

The doctor, in fact, is a very bulwark of refuge to these deluded simpletons, possessing as he does the confidence of the spirits and—only his clients do not recognise it—a greater share of subtlety and craft.

It is, as a rule, only in dreams, and not when a person is awake, that the souls of the departed appear to the living. For dreams occupy a very prominent place in the philosophy, the religion, and the life of these emotional people. Dream-land, in fact—although it is, as it were, a land of shadows or spirits,—is a veritable reality, and the figures of the dead which appear therein are looked on exclusively as souls, and in no sense as outside apparitions.

Once more, in the words of Odinaka Olisa, “apart from what our fathers have told us, the way in which we believe in the existence of the soul or the spirit is mostly through dreams, those which are good and those which are bad, *i.e.* nightmares. So we think that when a man is asleep, whether at night or in the day, his soul leaves the body and goes away and speaks, sometimes with the dead and sometimes with the living. So it is that on these occasions, or when a man projects his soul into the body of an animal, his own body remains altogether inactive and slothful, and as it is in a trance or during sleep, and it remains in this condition until the return of the soul.

“In this way we compare dreams, prophetic visions, death,

and sleep together, and always in connection with the soul, because it seems to us that one and all of them have the same meaning, *i.e.* that one is related to the other. For in sleep, just as in death, the soul leaves the body, and seeing, as we do in dreams, the souls of those who are living and those who are dead makes us believe this to be really the case. But not only do we see them, but in sleep we are able to talk to a spirit in the same language that it spoke when it was on earth. Why it is we see souls only when we are asleep, and not when we are awake, we cannot tell. All we can say is that our fathers have told us so, and we know such to be the case. The reason of it all—*i.e.* the explanation and the mystery—is with the great Spirit that rules over all, and with the spirit fathers. The figures of the dead which are seen in dreams are regarded as human because of their human shape and appearance; but as we cannot touch them, and one appears to be exactly the same as another, we say that they are souls or spirits. For men, although made by the same Creator, are outwardly of different aspect, but inwardly all men are alike—that is, their souls assume but one form.”

It is also the popular belief that the spirits of those who are dead visit the living in dreams and sometimes in visions, and the interpretation placed on these visitations, as they are looked upon, is the anxiety of the spirits in question to return to this world in the form of new creatures.

Dreams do not always have the same meaning to different people, but there are certain matters that, when dreamt of, are always interpreted in the same way.

Thus, for example, if a man sees red cloth in a dream, it means that one either of his own immediate household or near connections will shortly die.

If he dreams about a sword or a hatchet, and one of the women in his family happens at the time to be pregnant, the child, when born, is certain to be a male.

A dream as to animal excrement implies that the dreamer will become extremely wealthy.

If food is the subject-matter of the dream, the result is poverty.

When a man dreams that he has been sick or unwell, his



life is sure to turn out a long one; but if he dreams of health, it means that he will no longer live.

A snake seen in a dream implies a host of enemies seeking to destroy the dreamer's life. Nightmare is caused by the visitation of an evil or it may be antipathetic spirit.

Erotic dreams are sometimes caused by a good, sometimes by a malignant, spirit. No stories are current as to women becoming pregnant in this way among the Ibo or other tribes.

In discussing this question of the soul, the whole Ibo conception regarding animals and plants must be taken into consideration and understood.

Animals, according to the belief of all the Delta tribes, have souls as well as, but quite different from, men, which go away in a similar manner, but to a spiritland that is also separate from that which is reserved for human beings only. Animals are, in fact, a lower creation altogether, lacking as they do the power of speech, therefore it is that they are not treated as if human; and for the same reason, with the exception of the dog, to whom they communicate by signs, and perhaps the familiar goat, they deny the existence of any understanding between the two creations—*i.e.* in a natural sense, as they exist in this world,—the spiritual aspect of the mediums being quite another question that will be fully discussed later.

In the same way plants have lives and souls, also a land of spirits exclusively their own, to which the soul departs with the decay of the plant; but the vegetable is a degree lower in the scale of creation than the animal, having neither mind nor thought. "The soul," says Chukuma (a Niger Ibo whose name means "God knows"), "being invisible, it is impossible to say whether it can be shut into a hole or a confined space as you would shut a dog or a snake. We do not think such a thing, which is like the air, can be driven away by beating or by noise, because we think that it is always moving like the wind. Some of us—all those of my country, Aboh, for example—believe that evil spirits are not to be frightened away by the firing of guns or by any great noise, for we find that, in spite of firing many big cannon, the evil spirits still remain in our country in force."



This scepticism of the Aboh people—a section of the Ibo who, through marriage, are to a great extent intermixed with Igabo and Ijo—regarding the efficacy of noise in driving away spirits is interesting, because it is more or less a solitary exception. For, go where we will all over the Delta, the strongest evidence in favour of the existence of the contrary belief is to be seen in the very practical demonstration of it in almost every community.

The only seemingly evident explanation of this scepticism in the Aboh section is that of association with the more sceptical element of civilisation, as evidenced by the fact that numbers of these people have for many years past been associated in trade and as labourers with Europeans belonging to various commercial firms, and more recently to the Niger Company.

Yet, powerful factor as is association, it can scarcely in so short a time have effected a change so radical as this, opposed as it would also have been by an association the origin of which is lost in prehistoric antiquity, although it has no doubt exercised a certain indirect influence, as being the stronger factor in the direction mentioned.

So that it would appear as if, amid the universal unity regarding religion which prevails throughout the Delta, this one little tangent of divergence, like the isolated exception to the general rule, has crept in through the personality of some exceptionally morbid and melancholic old patriarch, who found to his cost that evil and its myrmidons existed, and were not to be frightened away by mere noise. This attempted explanation carries with it all the greater significance when the fact is taken into consideration that these Nigerians of the lower reaches are born bouncers, who practise the art of bluff as sincerely as they do their religion.

Analysing the matter carefully, as I have done, it is from their own standpoint more easy to comprehend the belief than it is the scepticism. For the very reason that Chukuma has given in support of the Aboh theory—because it is in this self-same mobility, in the fact that wind and mist come and go, that the popular belief is founded,—so in the elastic airiness of spirits they see an opportunity of driving them away on the

wings of the wind, as on the wings of an element that is similar to the soul.

So we find among the Efik, for instance, that this driving out of devils assumes the form of a public ceremonial of specific importance, and that at Old Calabar the purgation of the town from all ghosts and demons is a biennial event which is called "Ndok," a description and explanation of which will be given later on.

Regarding the immortality of the soul, the popular conception is vague, indefinite, and to a certain extent indefinable, not so much because these natural people have no definite ideas on the subject, but because, from a European standpoint, they are not in the habit of drawing up logical definitions on questions that they have accepted from their fathers, and the genuineness or accuracy of which they have neither inquired into nor questioned. Judging, however, from their practice, which is the strongest as it is the clearest evidence of their beliefs, they undoubtedly believe in the immortality of the soul. To quote two notable instances of this. In Benin City, for example, prior to 1897, the popular tradition to the effect that the king was immortal was a secret which was fostered and guarded by the priests with great jealousy. At Nembe, too, among the Brassmen, who, as we have seen, are descendants of the former, the same fiction prevailed up to the dethronement of King Koko in 1895. In their case, however, the deception was kept up not only as regards the king, but the high priest as well, whose position was regarded as practically on an equality with that of the former; and in the event of death it was strictly forbidden on the part of any one to say that either of them was dead, but that they had gone to Benin on a journey.

The custom which prevails among the Ibo and in most parts of the Delta—as it did in Benin—of confining the king to his own premises, must have originated in the first instance from this idea, which, of course, not only added to the regal dignity and importance, but impressed the people, as it was meant to do, with the sense of a power that was divine, and therefore out of the common.

This immortality has, however, certain indefinite limitations

that are, so to speak, merely local or individual. Among the Ibo, *e.g.*, a man, although he is bound to venerate his deceased parents, need only do so unto the sixth generation, when a renewal is made in favour of those recently deceased. Or again, it is possible for a certain family or clan to die out. This implies practical extinction, for so close is the connection between the human and the spiritual, interdependent as they are, that in the native estimation it means that the supply of human bodies has failed, through the malevolence of the powers of evil, to meet the demands of the spirit-souls, or, *vice versa*, that the spirit-souls, having become absorbed, or dispersed and devitalised, from the same malevolent or opposing causes, have been unable to prolong the reproductive principle of that particular clan or family. Further than this, as we shall see in Chapter IV., there appears to be a greater vitality in the spirit-matter that is confined to the human element than that which is relegated to the animal, and also presumably to the vegetable.

This, however, in no way affects the general principle of reproduction, which is believed to be, as it were, self-existent or eternal.

There is no belief in a second death of the surviving soul, but the idea is prevalent that a certain proportion of spirits, after a short recuperation in spiritland, are obliged to return to this world in another reincarnation, and that these are always reborn in the same family. In this way some persons live successive lives in this world and some do not. This rests with and depends entirely on the Creator, and according to the different bodies which he gives to the various personalities. So that it is palpable that the continuous existence of an individual or family is dependent on three contingencies, viz. the will and activity of the Creator or personal power, the destructive action of the destroying power, and the vitality and energy of the family spirits.

As an excellent illustration of European inability to see matters, especially those that concern religion, in the same light as the barbarian does, I quote an extract from a report on a journey in the Ibibio country, which was made in 1894, to Sir Claude Macdonald by Mr. Roger Casement. Having

concluded some remarks about funeral customs, the latter relates an incident which had occurred to him. "To prove that entire confidence as to the nature of the next world does not exist, I may mention the strange request of an Ibibio chief who came to my tent one day, and, after much embarrassment, finally asked if I would not give or tell him of some medicine that would prevent him from ever dying. He went away greatly disappointed at my confession of utter inability to help him here. That the powers of birth and of death were alike beyond the white man's control, these simple folk did not think possible."

As Mr. Casement is an officer who has the reputation of getting on very well with the natives, and deservedly so, I believe, because of his sympathy towards and the intelligent interest which he takes in them, any remarks of his ought to be accepted as of all the greater value for consideration. Yet, as we shall see, notwithstanding these two indispensable and essential qualities in connection with the handling of natives—all the more invaluable because of their rarity among our West African administrators,—his comprehension of them was merely the outlook of the average Englishman, who has formed his opinion of the barbarian in complete ignorance of his true faiths and formulas.

Looking into this simple matter, as Mr. Casement did, from the standpoint of the accepted theological future, and in evident ignorance of the doctrines of naturism, especially of the principles of metempsychosis, it is in no sense surprising that it appeared to him, first of all, as a strange request on the part of the Ibibio chief, and, secondly, as a proof of his lack of confidence as to the nature of the next world.

Approached, however, from the native standpoint, the request was neither as strange as it seemed, nor was it in any sense evidence of deficient faith. For, in the first place, the belief of these natives in the immortality of the soul, if not universal, is, as we have just seen, certainly general. In the second place, no doubt whatever exists in the minds of these natives regarding the nature of the next or spirit world, *i.e.*, of course, according to their own principles and beliefs on the subject. The doubt, if any, applied not to the existence,



but to the ultimate destination of the soul after the demise of the human body. Here the ground is dangerous—honey-combed, in fact, with snares and pitfalls; for in drawing up a balance-sheet certain contingencies have to be taken into consideration and reckoned with.

(1) First and foremost among these, the everlasting and inevitable Karma, with its perpetual recurrence of reacts in just and moral payment of previous acts that memory has no record of; (2) next, the acts that he has committed in his current existence, which are also certain of their reacts; (3) then the fact that between the present and the future any one of these may fall in such a manner as to deprive him of his life—the human first, and after it, by depriving him of the burial sacrament, the spiritual.

And if there is one thing in this world or in the next that natural man dreads with the same holy horror that he has of witchcraft, it is disembodiment; for, in his crude estimation, the disembodied soul is not merely an outcast and a wanderer, but lost for ever and aye in every conceivable sense of the word. Deprived of embodiment, it at once loses its individuality, and, being thus incapable of good, becomes a thing of evil, an eternal horror, and a malignant demon, lost—except in a demoniacal sense—to its ancestral household, *i.e.* to its own personality as it were, and to the Creator and creative principle. And just as disembodiment is a haunting fear that lives with them always, embodiment after dissolution is an intense satisfaction to them and a joy for ever, and is absolutely essential to preserve the spirit continuity and to protect it from evil. What is more, without this indispensable embodiment there can be no rest and no adoration, and to these savages rest and adoration form the two principal prizes or attractions of their future or spirit existence.

Here in a few words, then, is the explanation of the anxiety displayed by this Ibibio chief for the possession of immortality. For underneath his embarrassment, due to the pricks of a conscience no doubt full of offence and to the fear of the consequences of actual contact with a white wizard, he foresaw for himself a disembodied soul and entire disconnection and severance from his household in the flesh and in the spirit.



The only strange part of the whole incident was in reality the application of the chief to an individual who was not only of another colour and nationality, but who, in the estimation of himself and countrymen, belonged to an order of fiends incarnate, inimical in every sense to their welfare and interests—all the more so because the elixir of life, if not obtainable locally, is at all events purchasable in the Ibo country.

Yet, simple as he appeared to be in the eyes of Mr. Casement, and as he no doubt was from the standpoint of civilisation, this natural man was just as subtle as he was simple, and in nothing did he show his subtlety so much as in coming to the white man. For, remember that he came in good faith and all sincerity, believing that he was on the brink of dissolution and face to face with the inevitable doom of perdition—a fate from which there was only one escape, and that immortality. Apart, too, from the presumption that he may himself have been a doctor, it is more than possible that he had good cause to distrust the local medicos, for it may of course have been that he did not feel inclined to pay the price asked, and hoped to avoid it by throwing himself on the white devil's generosity, and in this way obtaining a much more efficacious remedy. Thus he bearded the devil in his den with one set purpose in his mind, and that was to cheat the devils he knew and feared by pitting against them a devil that neither he nor they knew, except by reputation.

Small wonder, then, that at the outset he showed embarrassment, standing, as he thought he did, between a local Scylla of devouring demons and an imported Charybdis whose devilries, for all he knew, were even more to be feared.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SACRAMENT OF BURIAL

THE importance of this ceremony in the ritual of these people cannot in any sense be overrated or overestimated, for it is not merely a sacrament, but an absolutely indispensable and vital sacrament. It is, in fact, the connecting link between this world and the next, as well as the passport, so to speak, of the soul, first of all into the land of the dead, and then through the hands of the Creator into the land of spirits. Without it, for a reason they cannot fathom, beyond the opposition of pre-existing spirits, the soul, when it leaves the dead body that has been its tenement for so long, cannot pass along the road that leads to its destination.

All that an Ibo or other Delta native can tell you is, that a man who has not been properly, *i.e.* twice, buried, the first time actually and materially, the second time spiritually, and as a memorial service, is looked on as an outcast and unworthy to eat or to associate with those who have received the rites, *i.e.* whose bodies have been washed, tended, and clothed, and to whom due honour has been paid by lamentations, the firing of guns, and the unlimited hospitality of one continuous feast. Indeed, both in principle and in practice the whole ceremony is identical with the "Shraddha" of the Hindus.

Further, it is popularly believed that souls recently released are invariably divided into two parties, namely, those who have been buried and those who have not, between whom there is no association of any kind; and it is the latter, prevented as they are from going to spiritland, who as ghosts

haunt houses and burial-grounds. This omission of a sacrament so evidently binding is apparently accountable for much of the duality that exists,—outcome of duality, as it has been in the first instance,—for it leads to the formation of two bodies who are constantly in opposition to each other. Much evil is in consequence attributed to the marplots of these unhallowed ghosts. They are, in fact, the disturbing elements of what might otherwise be a harmony between the living and their ancestors. Hence it is that while the natives live in fear of all spirits, judging them to be equally capable of good or evil, they are much more afraid of these goblins, because they consider them to act in a mad and foolish manner, and believe them to be irresponsible, yet vicious and malignant. For this reason they live in perpetual fear of death or at least of injury from them.

Finding it utterly impossible to get rid of or even to keep off these objectionable ghosts, the natives do all in their power to humour and appease their inveterate hate and insatiable greed. For this reason, sacrifices both human and animal, and in case of poor people the latter only, are an absolute necessity. These sacrifices have certainly a dual aspect, for, in the first place, they are performed at all funerals in honour of the departed souls, to enable them to be attended on with due ceremony by their slaves, and to eat as they had been accustomed to ; and, in the second place, they are thrown as a sop to the malignant element, or are mere acts of veneration towards their ancestors. In connection with this, another idea is prevalent, to the effect that animals are sacrificed at funerals in order to prevent the spirits from coming to this world to kill people. Thus animals so sacrificed are said to belong to all the spirits of that community in common, who, when they gather together to feast and entertain each other, divide them equally among themselves. So that in this direction it is quite evident that well-disposed spirits require the requisite attention to prevent any disagreeable alteration in their attitude.

Regarding this very serious question there is another and, from a human standpoint, no less serious aspect, which is the disgrace and ignominy attaching to a family that either scants

a full and elaborate ceremony or which altogether ignores the all-important *in memoriam* service.

Here again we see the dual characteristic of the people in the twofold nature of the disgrace. For the disgrace is not merely a human affair that excites the wrath and execration of the human community, but a spiritual palaver that condemns the souls of its own people to the perpetual degradation of the animal world, and that brings down upon itself the anger and retribution of the gods. Needless for me to remark that the exception to the general rule is of extreme rarity.

In other respects, particularly those of principle and of expenditure, these rites are more than ever like the Hindu ceremonial; for, no matter how absolutely poverty-stricken a family may be, all its relations and connections will scrape together every cowny they can get hold of, even to the extent of impoverishing or ruining themselves, so as to make an imposing show. For by so doing they first of all avoid the execration of their own kind, but, what is more to the purpose, they in every way strengthen and improve their spiritual position in gaining over the esteem and goodwill of the ancestral divinities.

One peculiar custom that prevails among the Ibo particularly shows how marked is the importance of these rites in the eyes of the people. It is customary when two chiefs or heads of houses have been on very intimate terms of friendship, on the death of one, for the survivor to contribute a goodly share towards the expenses incurred over his deceased friend's funeral ceremonies. And when he in turn is buried, the family of the first departed invariably contribute a similar amount towards his obsequies, in return for that which had been expended by him; but if this is not done, the former family is at liberty to claim the sum in question. The significance attaching to this custom is not to be gauged by the mere friendship of the act. That this is no mere friendship, but an intimacy, the intensity of which is so real and so enduring that it cannot be measured by human limits, is the direct and manifest interpretation of these mutual courtesies, implying the continuation of a human association in the

spiritual world—another striking illustration of the absolutely inseparable nature of the two existences.

To comprehend the exact position that this vital sacrament occupies in the minds of these people, I cannot do better than to give a full, sense for sense, if not word for word, and extremely vivid picture of it as described to me by Ephraim Agha, an Ibo of Onitsha.

*The Breaking-up or First Burial.*—On the death of any member of a family no time is lost in making the necessary preparations for the burial rites. These are of two kinds: the first is called the “Breaking-up,” in which the expense involved is not so great as in the second, known as the “Lamentation.”

All the nearest relatives meet at once at the house of the deceased to discuss the arrangements, and a notice to the effect is published amongst the community. In the meantime the corpse has been washed and enshrouded in white cloth. The death of a man or woman of young up to middle age is announced either on the same day or at the latest on the day following.

In the event of a king or chief, however, the announcement of his death is deferred for an indefinite period, during which time the body is undergoing a process of desiccation by smoke, the relatives in the meantime making every effort to collect all property of any value that can be turned to account, with the object of making as grand a ceremonial as their means will allow.

Every relative, or even connection by marriage, is bound by custom and law to contribute a share towards the funeral expenses, consisting principally of eatables, drinkables, the sacrificial offerings, and white or other cloth, which varies with locality. The share of a son-in-law, for instance, is usually a goat and ten strings of cowries, valued at 2s. 6d.

Although the death of a man is in reality a great loss to his household or even to the community, the occasion of his obsequies is regarded as an event of great entertainment to the community at large. It is looked upon as a circumstance in which the family honour is concerned in a distinctly two-fold sense, affecting its reputation in this world as well as in



the next. For the reception of the soul of the deceased in spiritland and his final prestige are altogether dependent on the grandeur and liberality of the human entertainment.

Not only are goats or human beings killed at all the different places in which the deceased had been a regular visitor, but they are sacrificed in all the various rooms of his own house—bath, kitchen, dining, sleeping, and sitting or state rooms—that he had been in the habit of always using.

Food, goats, fowls, yams, fish, plantains, palm oil, and palm wine, in lavish abundance, are provided for all visitors and strangers, but particularly for the women, whose office is to lament—*i.e.* to weep and to wail,—to sing, and to dance.

During the interval between death and burial all the relatives of the deceased gather together to mourn for him. These form the chief mourners, and the signs of grief on these occasions are intense and impressive. Copious tears are shed; the mourners, throwing themselves upon the ground, fall upon each other's necks, keep up a continual and tremendous noise and an altogether vociferous demonstration of grief. The personal appearance, also the ordinary ablutions, are entirely neglected, and the oldest and dirtiest clothes are donned. Among the female portion of the household, particularly among the wives of the deceased, and especially in the case of a king or chief, the lamentation is even more vociferous and demonstrative. The women are not permitted to go outside or to show themselves to people for a definite period, the duration of which does not exceed a year. Clad only in a kirtle made of plaited grass, they usually sit together in one room, with dismal faces, and mourn either as described, or at times in deep and dejected silence. But just as their nature is varied by striking contrasts, so is their lamentation—indeed, the latter is but a reflection of the former, and the intervals of supreme dejection are always succeeded by outbursts of movement and hilarity. For, no longer able to sustain the agony of extreme tension, a sudden revulsion of feeling takes place. The grief that has altogether overwhelmed them first of all with its outpoured passions, suddenly transforms itself into a wild tornado of seeming joy—the frenzy of overpowering sorrow, as it were, changing

into an ecstasy of unfeigned delight. Forming into a ring, they dance round and round the corpse, varying their movements to the chant of one who stands in the centre. But the joy is not so much feigned as a reaction, and, mingling with it, the real element finds a vent in singing and a loud wailing, not unlike the keening that is heard at an Irish wake.

Most conspicuous of all in this household of mourners are the eldest son and the eldest daughter. Walking about the house, they sing and cry alternately, the burden of their lament being as follows: "Welcome, my father; welcome, my father! My father is a big man! My father is a big man! This is the right hand of my father! My father, the son of a great man! My father, the highest!" In answer to each of these encomiums on the part of the son and daughter, the other mourners chime in with the response: "So it happened! So it is!"

The body is always wrapped in a mat and buried, for coffins are not used—only a king or big chief is entitled to them as a special mark of respect, and then only in those places which have come into touch with the outskirts of civilisation. The body of a chief or head of a house is buried inside the house, that of an ordinary person in the burial-ground. The graves are generally dug by a class of young men who are known in every town as the street-cleaners, whose office it also is to carry the corpse to the grave.

The afternoon of the day on which the corpse is to be interred is passed in dancing and the firing of guns, followed by the burial in the evening.

*The Lamentation or Second Burial.*—This is conducted on much the same lines as the first, except that a greater entertainment is provided and the expenses incurred are heavier.

In a spiritual sense, however, the rite is one of infinitely greater importance, because it is a special memorial service held over the deceased in order to release him from the thralldom of the region of the dead in which all souls are confined, where they exist on leaves or grass just like the brute beasts, and to usher him triumphantly, as befits his birth, into the abode of his fathers in the world of spirits.

For the universal belief on this point is that no human soul can attain to the peaceful ancestral habitations without this rite of second burial. Hence the great aversion shown by a community towards those who fail to observe this holy sacrament.

There are, however, two exceptions to this general rule. One is in the case of kings, who are buried but once, and whose souls, by virtue of the office and position they occupied on earth, pass into the Creator's presence without any longer detention than is entailed by the funeral obsequies, which generally last for about two weeks. The other is in the case of infants or very young children, for whom, because of their immaturity apparently, the necessity does not exist.

Human sacrifice was, and where civilisation has not yet reached still is, an indispensable feature of this ceremony, the number sacrificed varying from one up to a hundred or more according to the locality and the rank or wealth of the deceased, twelve being considered the ordinary number for a chief of some standing or a king.<sup>1</sup> These, always slaves, purchased specifically for the purpose from other localities, are generally killed, but sometimes buried promiscuously whether alive or dead. Formerly, within fifty years ago, this inhuman practice was carried on to a much greater extent, and, including even free-borns, hundreds were in this way sacrificed. Recently, *i.e.* down to the present day, the Aro have been the principal offenders in this direction, a hundred slaves and a horse or two being sacrificed on the death of an elder.

In localities where this custom has either been abolished or dropped, men of rank and wealth are expected to contribute a bullock at least, and also towards the proper provisioning with food and drink of three or four companies of dancers, besides the firing of as many cannon as they can afford.

It is the custom in some districts, only those that are more in touch with civilisation, to dress the corpse of a king richly and thus expose it to view.

It is believed that after the second burial the spirits first

<sup>1</sup> In the case of a king these sacrifices are made at the first burial, and also at annual memorial services.

of all weep for the departed soul, who, after a short ceremony of feasting, drinking, and dancing, is once more raised into the life of the spirit world.

When the memorial service, *i.e.* the sacrifices and the entertainment, has terminated, one of the male members of the household appears on the scene, masked, and dressed in a long robe, and all present declare unanimously that from henceforth this (*i.e.* the robe) shall be revered as the true spirit of the departed. Subsequently the robe is taken off and kept as a sacred relic.

Among the Ndoke and Ngwa sections of the Ibo, the ceremony called "Okuku," or memorial service, which is celebrated in honour of the dead, was formerly practised on a much more extensive scale, and with a much greater sacrifice of human life than now prevails. It is practically identical with the second burial or lamentation ceremony that has just been described, and may take place any time after six months up to within a year, the interval, it seems, depending entirely on the resources of the household and their ability to collect a sufficient revenue to meet the necessary outlay.

After the usual human and animal sacrifices have taken place, including, of course, the inevitable entertainment, the final "Okuku," or ceremony in memory of the departed, is performed in the house in which the late chief has been buried—its most important feature being the sacrifice and the eating of a male or female slave. This unfortunate creature is generally bought after the chief's death, and is fattened and well treated, and no one inside or outside the house is allowed to offend the victim in any way, for fear he might learn the secret of his fate and either commit suicide or run away.

The day chosen for the ceremony is always on Eke, the first day of the Ibo week, and especially on market day. While all the men and women of the deceased chief's household are engaged in singing and dancing all over the town, the doomed wretch is taken to the centre of the market-place and obliged to partake of food and drink, whether willing to do so or not.

At dawn the next morning, in the presence of all the old



men and women of the house, who assemble in the late chief's burial-room, the slave is beheaded by the eldest son, and the body is shared and eaten by all present.

This form of cannibalism is confined in some localities to the old only, while in others young as well as old participate in the disgusting rite.

In Nkwerri, which is almost in the heart of the Ibo country, the wives of a dead chief mourn for three to four years, and the children one year. Human sacrifice is not performed to any great extent, but in a chief's case a woman is usually killed and buried with him, in the belief that in this act the eyes of the departed soul, which were shut when he died, will be opened in spirit land.

Everywhere among the Ibo, as well as among the other tribes, the same practices, therefore the same beliefs, as I have found, prevail as to this period of enslaved probation and the existing necessity for the funeral sacrament in order to liberate the dormant soul from the clutch of the death god, and transport it from the regions of the dead to the land of the living spirits. And it is quite evident that without this sacrificial entertainment the soul would either remain for ever dormant, or, being in the power of the death god, be liable to absorption or to be utilised as a malignant force.

Among the New Calabar people the external or ceremonial aspect of this ancient rite is much more elaborate than it is among most of the other tribes, and as it was formerly practised by the Ibani, prior to the introduction of Christianity. One year after the death of a chief or consequential person, who had been the head of a household, his son or elected successor will secure the "*Duen-fubara*," *i.e.* an image representing the head and shoulders of the late deceased or his figure, in a sitting position. This, which is carved out of wood and painted with different dyes, in imitation of the face and head, surmounts a large wooden base or tray that, as a rule, is placed in a recess. It is also usual to place not more than two smaller images, one on either side, representing sons or near relations of the late deceased who may have died subsequently to him. On this tray, and surrounding the heads, horns, glasses, pots, chairs, and as many articles of this



description as can be crammed on to it, are arranged for the very evident use of the spirit father.

In front of this pedestal three rudely made altars of mud are erected, with a hole in the middle of each, for the purpose of throwing the food and libations that are constantly offered to the presiding spirits, who, it is believed, eat and drink of them; while on the top of the altars it is usual to place from six to nine of the old manillas, which are large, twisted, and made of copper—a metal that is very highly prized by these people.

As showing how great and sincere is the reverence with which they regard these “Duen-fubara” or wooden images, the inhabitants of Fuchea—a small town belonging to the tribe—possess and exercise the sole right and monopoly of carving and constructing these images for the rest of the community,—a privilege the significance of which can only be measured and appreciated after a thorough comprehension of the ancestral creed and the indispensable importance of these sacred emblems as necessary embodiments for the household spirits. The day on which the image is finished, or rather delivered, is regarded as a public holiday and festival, when a grand installation ceremony is commenced. All the chiefs from the different towns attend in their largest and finest gig-canoes, and accompany the “Duen-fubara” from Fuchea to its destination. This is done at night, for custom forbids the landing of the sacred emblem by day, and as soon as this has been accomplished it is deposited for safe-keeping in the quarters of one of the other chiefs, usually the greatest personal friend of the late departed. Here it remains for a week, *i.e.* eight days, and on the eighth day a great sacrifice of goats and fowls is offered up by the late chief’s household, as well as by all those intimate friends who hold his memory in remembrance. The eldest son, or elected successor by virtue of his office acts as master of the ceremonies, and personally performs the sacrifice in the presence of the people and the “Duen-fubara,” over which, as he cuts the neck of each separate victim, he throws or sprinkles the blood; and when this portion of the ceremony has been performed, the flesh is cut up and evenly distributed among all those who are in attendance.

Following next in order, but prior to its removal to its own proper and final resting-place, the most interesting feature of the whole ceremony takes place.

The sons of the deceased, dressed up as priests, their faces marked all over with the sacred chalk, on their heads the large and exceedingly high native-made straw hats, and a fathom of white baft tied round their waists, put themselves at the head of the entire male portion of their household, who are attired in full war dress, and proceed in a body to the chief's quarter, in which the "Duen-fubara" has been deposited. Here, however, they are met by the men of the house, who, also prepared for war, oppose their entrance. For some three to four hours a mimic battle rages round the premises, the invaders trying to get possession of the image, and the defenders making a brave show of resistance.

At the end of this time the defence begins to slacken, and the battle ceasing by mutual consent, the invaders are allowed to take over the now blood-stained and consecrated image. This is done in a formal manner, only the sons of the late departed or the elected freeborns of the house being permitted to touch or handle it. A procession is then formed, and the emblem conveyed in state to the quarter which has been prepared for it. The ceremony of this sham-fight seems to indicate the idea that if a thing is worth having it is worth fighting for. For as the spirit of the late liberated, in his present dual capacity of spiritual head and mediator or communicator, is absolutely indispensable to the household, the struggle to get possession of him is practical and vigorous evidence of the anxiety of its members to retain a power, without which the house is helpless and uncontrollable.

On arrival at the mausoleum the "Duen-fubara" is placed in the hall or outer room of a house which has been specially built for the purpose, and a watchman is appointed to remain in charge of it. This trusty individual is held responsible that the place, *i.e.* the embryo house chapel—now consecrated by the spiritual presence, which has been previously invoked and conjured into this special emblem—is daily swept and kept clean.

A further festival of sacrifice and feasting, or ceremony

of signalising the consecration, takes place as the culminating act of a sacrament which, as forming the inevitable link or bridge that connects the human with the spiritual, is indispensable.

In this long and very elaborate ceremony that we have just discussed there are three prominent landmarks which must be taken special notice of. The first is, that the ceremony itself is nothing but the identical memorial service in honour of the dead which is common to one and all of these different tribes, only modified in this case with regard to human sacrifices, owing to the deterrent effect of civilised rule.

The second is, that as such, it is the purely spiritual function of securing the passage of the soul from the land of death to the land of the spirits—not of the living, be it remarked, for death as used here does not imply finality.

And the third is, that it is the consecration of the now released, redeemed—in a twofold sense, as we shall see later on—and sanctified spirit, in his new position as spirit father and mediator of the household, a position which, apart from his own personality, entitles him to a daily adoration and a still more important weekly worship, accompanied by sacrifice, the details of which are discussed in Section VII.

Thus is formed a regular and systematic gradation of steps, by which the human succession is continued in the eldest or sacred son and the spiritual supervision in the father, whose existence in the flesh has recently terminated. And this is a point which, as we shall see in Chapter III., and indeed throughout the whole part, cannot in any sense be over-rated. For this spiritual supremacy is not only responsible for the morality and discipline of these people, but, as we shall see in Chapter IV., it preserves the continuity of the human household by maintaining and keeping intact the necessary supply of the ever-indispensable spirit, without which the existence of the former would be merely one of perpetual torpidity, possessing neither vitality nor intelligence, very similar to the condition of animals or reptiles when hybernating. Indeed, it is not in the least difficult to recognise in this state of dormant inaction, which is so graphically pictured among certain species of the animal world, one of the principal

experiences encountered by natural man, which engendered in him the belief that the spirit, whether human, animal, or vegetal, is alone and entirely responsible for a life of action and motion, and what is of still greater moment as regards the two former, of intelligence.

Among the Ibani it was formerly customary, and no doubt still is, in spite of professed Christianity, on the death of a chief or big person, to pour a couple of casks of rum or palm wine on the ground or over his grave, the idea being to provide the departed soul with a sufficient supply of spirit for the entertainment of his ghostly visitors. This custom, which, in a greater or lesser degree, is universal to the Delta, is, however, much more elaborately practised by the coast tribes, as well as by the different sections of the Ijo race. In Brass, for instance, there is no special funeral ceremony when an ordinary person dies beyond the regulation lamentation and dancing, but in the event of the death of a king or high priest, a chief, or individual who has accomplished *Peri* during his lifetime, the play of *Peri* is always performed. *Peri*, it appears, is the act of an individual who has killed a man with his own hands personally, either as an enemy during a state of war between two tribes or clans, or even towns of the same clan, or who has taken the life of a member of the same community who has offended against its laws, and which has approved of his death. All men who are so distinguished are held high in the public esteem, and, irrespective of rank, become members of an organised fraternity which, on the death of one of its members, at once assembles to do honour to him in the spirit. Marking the upper part of their bodies with the sacred chalk, and headed by the son or nearest relative of the departed as master of the ceremonies, they first form themselves into a procession. A performance, imitative of the act of killing a man, is then given—the performers, armed with matchets, gesticulating in a peculiar kind of way, sing a well-known song, and subsequently wind up this act of the funeral drama by dancing all over the place in a state of suppressed frenzy.

Kamo then appears on the scene. This is an invitation of all the notables, *i.e.* the kings, high priests, chiefs, warriors, etc., of the community to a grand banquet in spirit land, the



material counterpart of which is held in the burial-ground. Food of every description having been prepared, is consumed by all present, a certain proportion being allotted to the spirits, who are pictured as enjoying the feast along with the newcomer, whose advent is thus practically welcomed. When all the food has been consumed, liquor, usually rum, is produced, and drunk first of all by the living, and afterwards distributed among the spirits for their especial delectation. This is done by the master of the ceremonies, who walks round the graves, and, with a trembling hand, pours a quantity of rum on each tomb. Then, as a final act, prior to the interment of the deceased, the spirit in large quantities is poured into the newly dug grave. Indeed, in this way two or three casks are literally wasted in what is esteemed as an exceedingly joyous celebration. In these two ceremonies the connection that exists between the flesh and the spirit is once more plainly evident. For having honoured the entity in his human form, the honour is further extended to his spirit after it has taken its departure from the now defunct body. Here, as we shall see more fully later on, it is in the substantiality of the offering that the honour lies. So the generous liquor is poured out *ad lib.*, and the satisfying meat of bullocks and goats, along with the rich and sirupy oil of the palm, is consumed in lavish abundance. For it is meet that the spirits also should in a spiritual sense partake of both, and so enjoy the pleasure and satisfaction of eating and drinking, as they did when in the flesh, or as they do when they return to it.

Referring to the peculiar distinction with which a person is regarded who has slain a man either in battle or justifiably and legally, the undoubted significance of the act lies not in the valour of the performance, but almost entirely in the fact that it is the shedding of blood in a righteous or patriarchal cause, *i.e.* in defence of the household, and with the full ancestral sanction and authority, which at once renders it sacred—a sacrament, in fact, in their eyes. For, believing, just as did the Jews, that the blood is the life, they also believe that while, from a legitimate standpoint, it purifies and sanctifies, from the opposite aspect it pollutes and desecrates.

Among these same people this sacrament of burial is also



very religiously observed, but although not conducted exactly on the same lines as those laid down by the Ibo, the underlying principle regarding the condition and liberation of the spirit is practically identical. The body of a king or high priest is kept for three days, and buried in the presence of all the chiefs; the corpse of a king is forbidden to be seen by the high priest, as well as by his son and heir or successor, and that of a high priest is never looked on by a king. For, as we have seen, the prohibition was a fostering of the belief in immortality.

Youths are buried on the same day, but men and women of riper years are kept overnight, for the observance of "Noinkoru," *i.e.* a watch over the dead, and dancing in honour of the departed soul is kept up until daylight.

Apart from the ordinary burial-ground, special places are selected and reserved for the following, who are buried without the funeral rites: (1) children; (2) those who have met their death by accident or misadventure, or whose end has been violent and unnatural; (3) all witches or those suspected of witchcraft, the bodies being placed on the branches of mangrove trees; (4) those who have died with unhealed sores on the body, regardless of their rank or importance, the place being well removed from the town.

These same rules are observed by the Ibo, and, in fact, by all the Delta tribes, only it is general to throw the bodies of children into any bush except that specially reserved for burial, while those who have met violent deaths are buried close to the scene of their occurrence.

Among the Brassmen, however, in the instance mentioned in No. 4, especially in the case of a notable or influential member of the community, it is possible sometimes after the interment to remove the still incarcerated soul to the proper burial-ground. This must, however, be done by means of a special ceremony, which is performed by a priest or doctor. Having prepared a native-made coffin and placed it quite open in a canoe, the priest paddles over to the special burial-ground. When he arrives there he calls aloud the name of the deceased three times. The canoe is then seen to vibrate by means of a process that is invisible, but the cause of which is imputed

to the invoked spirit, who has by this time entered not only into the coffin, but also into the diminutive figure that is carved out of mangrove wood, rubbed all over with red camwood, and meant to represent him. The priest then returns to the town, and conveys the figure and coffin to the house to whom the spirit belongs. A second full-dress funeral ceremony takes place, and the carved image of the deceased, containing his soul, is then buried in the ordinary cemetery.

This act of transferring the spirit-soul from one resting-place to another is called "Fengu," and the officiating priest the "Duwe-fengu-owo," *i.e.* the recaller of departed spirits.

Another of my numerous informants, one Epe, himself a native of Nembe, educated and intelligent, says: "It is usual to perform the ceremony of transferring and reburying the spirit-souls of those who had been buried as outcasts to the proper burial-ground at such intervals when the number of the latter have amounted to something like about forty souls. It is also usual for all those families who are interested in the matter to see that the requisite number of coffins and figures are prepared, and when this is done the latter are tied to the lids of the former, and an arrangement is made by all concerned with the priest regarding the appointment and performance of the actual ceremony."

A dark night is usually selected, and about an hour after midnight "the recaller of departed spirits" sets out for the special burying-ground, accompanied by a representative from each house carrying a coffin. They make their way in canoes, and on arriving the priest calls out in a loud voice the name of each spirit-soul to come forth. When he has finished calling the roll, the priest informs the representatives that the spirits, in answer to his summons, have informed him that they are unable to burst or break through the tenement in which they are confined, and that they cannot move therefrom until their debts have been paid for them. Each of the representatives—who come provided for emergencies—now produces a piece of cloth, which is handed to the priest. Armed with the various pieces, also with a supply of raw plantains, chopped up, and a cockle-shell full of rum, he leaves the assembly, and, advancing still farther into the bush among the graves, deposits

these articles upon the ground, and in a loud voice informs the spirits that they are to arrange their affairs with them. All this time he keeps on blowing a horn, in a low and subdued tone. Then on a sudden he calls out to one of the representatives to open his coffin, and soon after to close it down, as the spirit has gone inside. Continuing this operation in the same way, all the spirits are conjured into the figures that are in the coffins. These are only about five inches in length, and half that number in thickness, clearly demonstrating the elastic and contractile qualities of the spiritual element in the minds of the natives.

On the completion of this extremely delicate operation great joy is at once manifested, and the whole assembly return to the town, accompanied by the recalled and recaller, who beguiles the way by discoursing music on a horn, to convey merriment and sympathy to the released and now joyous souls. The remainder of the night is devoted to a watch over the rescued spirits, who later on in the morning are interred with honours in the proper burial-ground.

Among the Efik and Ibibio, to announce the death of a king or chief either very suddenly or too soon is considered a great dishonour, especially in the case of a son, who must only be informed indirectly by an allusion or a hint. The body is preserved by desiccation—a custom that is prevalent throughout the Delta, including even the Igarra, and at the end of four or six months the funeral rites begin. Drums are beaten, guns are fired, and at a fixed hour the lamentation is renewed with great ardour. Should the deceased have been a member of Egbo, a grand procession of all its members is formed from the palaver house to his residence, in which any emblems of office which may have belonged to him are carried. The inevitable entertainment is organised, at which feasting, drinking, and dancing are carried on to an unlimited excess for a period of two weeks, at the end of which time the body is interred, and the ceremony terminates.

On the death of a chief or big person in the Ogoni country, the household at once contribute 200 manillas, in order to hire special drummers to play in honour of the deceased. The first and second sons are then obliged to sacrifice a goat each.

The ceremony, which is very similar in all respects to those that have been described, lasts, as a rule, for a period of eight days, on the last day of which the chief is buried.

In the event of a rich woman dying, the eldest son is obliged to kill a bullock and three goats, and to spend eighty manillas for tombo. With this a large feast is prepared, to which only the family and intimate friends are invited. Drums are then beaten and guns fired, the interment taking place on the eighth day.

The burial customs of the Andoni are, however, somewhat different from those of the other tribes. Irrespective of rank or wealth, when a person dies the body is wrapped up in fishing mats and placed upon a mud altar, about two feet high, which is built in the "Oroang-Ekuku," or bush for the dead. The bodies are washed, and treated in a similar way to that which prevails among the Ibani, and they are then decked out in many cloths, beads, etc., and in the case of chiefs or big persons, sacrifices of goats and fowls are offered up, the blood of which is purposely thrown on and towards the feet of the deceased. The parents or wives and nearest relatives fire off many guns in the burial-ground, where, for the first four days, the food is cooked and eaten once a day only, a certain portion of it being first of all placed on the ground, close to the altar, on which deceased is lying in state.

Another condition peculiar to these people is that the funeral ceremonies are only performed by the companions, or the members of the Ofiokpo, or any of the other tribal societies to which the deceased may have belonged.

### THE NATURAL ASPECT OF DEATH

Death is not only accepted and looked on as a spiritual causation, but death itself is personified and dealt with as a powerful spirit, who—subsequent to a struggle for supremacy that alternates very considerably, and altogether variably and unevenly—gains the mastery over the life of the human ego by depriving the soul of the body, *i.e.* ejecting the former, so that dissolution supervenes in the latter. Indeed, the native conception of death is that of a relentless and inexorable



demon, who, although omnivorous, and a glutton who is always gorging himself, is not so much a devourer of souls as a carrier away of them.

Death, under certain conditions and circumstances, is recognised by these natives as an effect which has been perpetrated or put into execution by this spiritual soul-snatcher, the cause of which is assigned to some former act of omission or commission on the part of the defunct. Under this heading would be classed all deaths which are due, from the European standpoint, to accident, design, or violence; while those which, in a civilised sense, are attributed to senile decay or to natural causes, are considered to be the legitimate work of the death spirit, pure and simple, especially in the case of infants or very young children.

It is, however, impossible to discuss this matter of death without taking into consideration the question of witchcraft; but as this is being fully and specifically dealt with in its proper place, it is only necessary at this stage of the inquiry to remark that, according to popular estimation, nearly every death is, in the first instance, at all events, attributed to or associated with the accursed magic.

Following immediately upon the opinion that has just been expressed, an element of decided contradiction appears to be here implied in this latter statement. There is, however, in reality no contradiction. For the intervention of witchcraft is but a human adjunct, that in no way interferes with the acts of the death spirit; on the contrary, that is believed either to assist or to act independently of the latter by co-operating with certain forces that lie outside the domain of Nature, the result arrived at being exactly the same, however, viz. capture and expulsion, possibly extinction, of the soul and dissolution of the body. But thoroughly dissected and analysed, from the standpoint of native philosophy, the fact still remains that death is the severance of the spirit-soul from the human, corporeal body.

Although death is the result of the enforced expulsion of the soul from the body, in other words, the dissolution of the body consequent on its deprivation of the animating principle, it is quite as essential and inevitable in the scheme of creation



as reproduction is. Indeed, to these natives, without reproduction there can be no death, just as without death there can be no reproduction. For, as we shall see in Chapter IV., under headings (*a*) to (*c*), the principles that are involved in transmigration are as essential to their mode of thought and wellbeing as life itself, the dissolution and reproduction of human, animal, and vegetal bodies being necessary to provide new and suitable tenements for the ever mobile and exchanging souls.

Let us take, for example, the death of the head of a household. During the illness which proves to be his last, all those who are nearest and dearest to him—his sons, wives, daughters, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and confidential slaves, including also his most intimate friends—are in the habit of attending on him until his death; and it is not considered unlucky to be present at the supreme moment. Indeed, it is the universal custom for all the members of a family to be present, with the exception of any one who is specially prohibited by order of the dying man. Apart, of course, from the ties of affection, one, if not the chief, reason for this assembly of the family is that of hearing by word of mouth the final and particular instructions that the dying patriarch may have to give as to the disposal of certain property, or regarding any particular members.

To those who are assembled the moment is not only one of the intensest anxiety, because of the departing member, but on the fate of the master, as well as on the attitude of his successor towards them (plus the intrigue fomented by secret jealousies, envies, and animosities of contending rivals and factions), their own fate hangs, and the supreme moment of severance that awaits every ego threatens to overtake them out of its turn, and long before the allotted time. Because the fear of the unhallowed and immoral cancer of witchcraft is as much an heirloom in every family of the Delta as the more precious heritage of the spirits who govern them. An heirloom which, although it is hated and dreaded, has so strong a hold on the nerves of these emotional and neurotic people that they bend their necks submissively, and submit to its enormities as to the inevitable, from which there is no escape.

Attached as they are to the dying man, some of them

sincerely and genuinely so, and believing firmly in the spiritual life, there is no desire, all the same, on their part to be sacrificed in order to accompany his departing spirit, or to undergo the poison ordeal, so as to prove and establish their innocence.

From this crucial test, this expected doom of sudden death that confronts them, and the dread not only of horrible uncertainty but of agonising suspense, it is not in the least surprising, fatalistic though these natives are, that they shrink as from a fate that is uncanny, and in their opinion undeserved. For the sting of it lies, not in the doom itself so much as in the terrible anticipation of an act of spiritual seizure, that under normal circumstances might have been postponed for ever so long.

Thus, one of the customs which appertains to the Ibibio and Efik is that which rules that all widows must be flogged by Egbo, in accordance with their deserts. They are also fined to pay Egbo, and have their clothes torn, their faces defiled, and all their household utensils broken. This peculiarly drastic treatment, particularly the flogging, if not too severe, is not feared, however; on the contrary it is, curious though it may seem, rather liked and looked forward to, because looked upon as a clearing away of old scores, which relieves the widows at least of fear for the future, being, as it is, in a few words, the happy release that removes the uncertainty of the dreaded doom that has been up till then hanging over them in the spectral, but none the less substantial shape of death, the inveterate foe of human life.

#### A DESCRIPTION OF THE FUNERAL RITES AND CEREMONIAL

Immediately after death any cloth which the deceased was wearing is taken away, the corpse is washed, the limbs are straightened and dressed in the best cloth, the household supplying the want in the event of poverty or a scanty wardrobe. The persons who perform this office are regarded as unclean, and obliged to purify themselves before they can become clean again. For to touch a dead body, or have anything to do with a grave, is considered a pollution, and it is

unlucky for a man to come into a house with the dirt of the grave upon his person.

The corpse is generally left in its own house, but in cases where the house is either too small or too poor in which to receive friends, it is moved to a better or more commodious residence.

The elaborate manner of embalming, as it was practised by the ancient Egyptians, is not, of course, known; but in the cases of kings or chiefs, where the obsequies are prolonged and conducted on a grand scale, and it is essential to keep the corpse above ground, a rude method of embalming is carried out. Having first smeared the body with a decoction made from certain plants, which are boiled down, it is rubbed all over with camwood, and if it is to be preserved for some time, a quantity of spirit, usually rum, is poured over it, and it is then wrapped up in large mats. The favourite method, however, which prevails among one and all of these tribes is to smoke-dry the corpse. This, as a rule, especially among the Igara, Efik, and other coast natives, is confined to preserving the bodies of men of note and distinction only. But among the Aro and Ibo from the interior, when any of their members die away from their homes, it is customary always to desiccate and to convey the corpse to the family of the deceased, and they immediately summon all distant relatives, and make an inquiry into the cause of death. Among all those tribes with whom I came into contact cremation is not practised, for this custom would be opposed in principle to their belief in the destructive powers and finality of fire, which, although it is unable to destroy the soul or spirit, is considered infallible in its operations as regards the material. There are, however, certain exceptions, as, for instance, when the Efik and Andoni mothers burn the bodies of their infants—*vide* Chapter IV.—as a warning to the spirits to desist from depriving them of the life and society of their infants.

When the body is about to be buried, a funeral procession is formed of the family and friends, and others of the community who are in sympathy with the deceased, and the body is carried to the grave in a lying posture. After burial,

salutes are fired, the number of guns depending on the rank and wealth of deceased. In the case of a chief or king these salutes are continued for eight days, the guns being fired at intervals throughout the day and night; and in the event of his having been a grandfather they are kept up for just double that period, and the adjacent towns are notified to that effect, a memorial service being observed annually in honour of such local celebrities only. This doubling of the salute to a grandfather is, in fact, a bestowal of that honour to whom honour is not only due as an ancestral right and privilege, but which is the meed of him who, prior to his departure to the rest or strife of spirit land, left behind him a double reminder in two generations of the flesh—a solid memorial, which entitles him to an increased spiritual control.

For ordinary people only three or four guns are fired, according to the means of the household, and the firing is limited to four days, and on the evening of the last day the eldest son or brother gives a feast to the whole family, including friends. In this firing of guns, both large and small, the object is not merely to honour the departed, or to announce his departure to spirit land, but to clear the road of malevolent demons, so as to ensure him a safe conduct and a journey free from molestation.

In connection with the funeral ceremony of big men, the wake—as we have seen—takes a prominent part in the form of dancing, singing, entertainment of strangers, and, among the coast tribes, of racing war canoes; and, in many instances, the dancing and singing is kept up for a month, and even two, *i.e.* as long as the stamina of the performers and the resources of the household hold out.

While this festival is progressing, but during an early phase of the proceedings, the daughters and grand-daughters of any notable, dressed and ornamented in their best, and accompanied by a party of female singers, walk through the town and notify to the people the virtues and wealth of their late father. Mourners are never hired, and self-mutilation by the mourners is not practised, but signs of mourning are worn.

It is customary on these occasions, more especially in the event of the death of some powerful or influential personage,



to make speeches or to deliver eulogies in his honour; but these, as a rule, are made by friends, and seldom, if ever, by public orators.

The ordinary mode of burial is in the earth, although mud altars and platforms in trees are used by the Andoni, as they also were, until quite recently, by the Okrika and Efik. In the event of death from smallpox, however, it is still usual for the Okrika and others to wrap the corpses in mats and place them in the branches of trees, while the majority of the tribes, especially those on or near the coast, merely throw them into the bush, as they do all those which, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, are looked on as corrupt and unclean.

The body is laid flat on the ground when the grave has been dug, the head being placed in no particular direction, and beyond those which have been already described no other ceremonies are observed. Once a grave has been filled in it is never reopened, even for the interment of any one who was very dear to the deceased.

It is also customary to bury implements, weapons, insignia of office, ornaments, and other articles, such as cloth, wearing apparel, plates, furniture, powder, pottery, wooden or clay images, in addition to the sacrificial victims, human and animal. The reason given in explanation of this custom is, as has already been pointed out, that while the former are for the use of the departed soul in spiritland, the latter are his personal attendants.

Although in no way very particular regarding the safety of those articles of value which are buried with the corpse, and in spite of the fact that no special precautions are taken to guard against it, cases of sacrilege are of very rare occurrence. This, however, is accounted for by the belief that the spirits take them into spiritland.

Fishermen and dwellers on rivers and creeks who are in the habit of using canoes never utilise them as a means of interment.

The heads of kindred or friends are never preserved or kept, as to do so would be opposed to tradition and custom, according to which only enemies who have been killed in war



are decapitated, and, after a great display of pomp and ceremonial, the heads are preserved as trophies, which are not infrequently converted into symbols. There are, of course, exceptions to this general rule, when, *e.g.*, the heads of relatives or friends who have been killed in war are subsequently recovered, or, in such instances, when friends have become converted into enemies, or yet again, when members of the same community are condemned to death and beheaded in expiation of crimes committed against the state.

I have already, in the previous chapter, alluded to and partially described the custom universal all over the Delta, but known in Nembe as Peri. To understand it, however, in all its significance it will be well, at this stage of the proceedings, to give a description of the ceremony in full.

On the return from war the captives are beheaded on a special slaughter-ground, which is usually situated about a mile from the town. The performance of this office is considered a high honour, which, in the first instance, is always specially conferred on a chief or person of some rank or standing, while it is also open to men of lesser mark who have greatly distinguished themselves by some special act of valour. On the arrival of the executioners at the entrance of the town, they are met and escorted, each to his own home, by their own female relatives. It is, as a rule, customary for the eldest sisters to receive the heads—which are now looked on as trophies, or somewhat in a similar light to medals—from their brothers, and to carry them to the family residence, primarily to be prepared as food, and eventually to be installed in the place of honour.

On the way a demonstration takes place in the person of each of these sisters, which in the singular and ferocious outburst of joy evinced is but an outer manifestation of those inner human emotions that, although set in motion by the so-called spiritual, become an absolutely uncontrollable factor when the lower instincts are aroused. Throwing the head about, as well as on the ground, when they jump over it, each one of these now, as it were, frenzied women performs all sorts of extraordinary antics and cuts every kind of caper which is curious and unimaginable, and they go through a variety of

gestures and contortions resembling those of animals more than of human beings. These, which are said to be indicative of internal pleasure, and in a certain sense of religious fervour, are varied by frequent announcements relative to the fraternal prowess. In this way, until the homesteads are reached, they keep on gesticulating, capering, and crying out in loud and excited voices: "My brother's victim—his honour-conferring trophy—slaughtered by my brother," or words to the same effect. Each head is then clean shaven, prepared, and cooked, for the delectation of the elder sister in particular, but in those communities on the coast which are in touch with civilisation, when there is any compunction on her part to partake of this repast, some one belonging to the household is hired for the purpose, and paid by the sister out of the remuneration she receives as her share of the booty that has been captured.

The skulls in each case are religiously preserved and converted into trophies, which, dyed on one side with camwood and on the other with chalk, are placed either on an altar, along with similar household trophies or symbols, or on trees that are sacred and symbolical of ancestral spirits or deities. The bodies too, which at first are always hung upon trees, are in the end invariably eaten; for, in regard to prisoners of war, one and all of these tribes are, or until quite recently were, essentially cannibalistic.

During the period of these feasts the orgies which take place are positively disgusting and repulsive, men and women rushing, dancing, or reeling through the town, carrying in their hands pieces of cooked or smoked human flesh, which they eat and revel in with absolute pleasure and enjoyment from a sheer sense of satisfaction in the solid and substantial. Brutal and loathsome as it all is, there is in this hideous carnival of the carnal lusts and passions a spiritual significance—a satisfying sacrifice to the ancestral spirits who have given them the victory and delivered the enemy into their hands.

The act of decapitation, as we have seen, is esteemed a very high honour, conferred by the king on notables and important personages only; but when the person appointed

lacks the courage to sever the head from the body, he touches the sword, and then hands it to a substitute provided by him at a handsome remuneration, who performs the operation for him. It is customary and necessary for the executioner to lick the blood that is on the blade—the reason for which we shall soon inquire into—also to remain in the house for three days. During this period he sleeps on the bare floor, eats off broken platters, and drinks out of calabashes or mugs which are also damaged. On the fourth day, dressed in his best clothes and ornamented with a number of eagle's feathers and any fineries that he may possess, he sallies forth and walks round the town, paying visits to all his most intimate friends.

These feathers, which are stuck into the hair, are obtained from a species of fish eagle, or large white and brown kite, and each white feather represents the destruction in this manner, or under the circumstances already mentioned, of a human life.

The sword which is used on these occasions is specially reserved for this particular purpose, and in Brass is called "Isene-Ogidi." It is greatly revered by all, and is not spoken of even in jest. A person who in a contention with another is desirous of hurting, or rather injuring, his feelings to the utmost usually swears by it. Apart from the usual sanctity that in the eyes of every owner, maker, or person is ordinarily attached to weapons, instruments, implements, tools, and all articles in fact which are in common or daily use, or in any way utilised outside the occupations and routine of everyday life, there is a special significance associated with the sword in question. Connected as it is with a sacrifice that is human, therefore all the more sacred because of its greater and sublimer significance, this instrument of death and outward emblem of the life-taker or spirit-snatcher is anctified first of all on account of its association with a sacred sacrifice, and secondly because of its practical utility in obeying the behests and fulfilling the command of its spiritual mentor or possessor with unfailing skill, keenness, and precision. Judging from its name alone, it is legitimately reasonable to infer that as a lawful instrument of justice there was

a distinct association between the tribal god "Ogidiga" and the sword "Isene Ogidi"; and it is further possible that in more remote days some connection may have existed with the god "Ogidi," who was the ancestral divinity of the Ibo clan Obo, who lived in the country of Amadgwio. This inevitable spiritualism of the material, which is universal not only in the Delta area but outside of it, has been touched upon generally in various sections, but more particularly and specifically in Section V. Thus (as among the Hindus), every domestic utensil as well as tool or implement by which people earn their living or get their food is endowed with a spirit of its own, that in its deepest essence is the animator and mover of the article in question, giving force and propulsion to a paddle, accuracy and precision to an arrow in its flight, a keen edge and unerring aim to a sword or an axe. For this reason it is that the Yorubas say of the axe itself that it enters the forest, cuts the tree, and is not afraid—implying that it is the familiar spirit who is in the axe that gives it courage and moves it accordingly to enter and to cut.

This natural cult, as in fact every custom and ceremonial which is connected with their sociology, is essentially a question of personal association. In this way it is that even the most impersonal and material object or substance has in the first instance been associated with a personality and then spiritualised by the spirit contained therein—a fact which at once implies its ancestral origin, every single formula or ceremonial having at one time formed, as it still forms, an association with some particular or pre-eminent ancestor. So what we Europeans call the past is linked to the present, and this in its turn is connected with the future. For, believing as these people do in a life of two existences which are continuous, merging one into the other as the human does into the spiritual, and back again as the latter does in the former, time for them has in reality no divisions as it has for us. Equally so, it has neither value nor object, and for this reason is treated with an indifference and a contempt that is altogether inexplicable to the European.

The custom of licking the blood off the blade of a sword by which a man has been killed in war is common to all these tribes, and the explanation given me by the Ibo, which is



generally accepted, is, that if this was not done, the act of killing would so affect the strikers as to cause them to run amok among their own people; because the sight and smell of blood render them absolutely senseless as well as regardless of all consequences. And this licking the blood is the only sure remedy, and the only way in which they can recover themselves.

It is on this principle too, as we shall see in Section VII., that all sacrifices, human and animal, are performed. For just as it is essential to kill a woman when a chief dies in order that his eyes should open in spiritland, or to slaughter slaves, who are his hands and feet, with a view to a continuity on their part of personal attendance on their master in the same abode, so it is an obligation as well as a virtue for the shedder of any human blood in a righteous cause to drink of the blood and eat of the flesh.

This principle and the belief in the extreme efficacy of a sacrifice that was not only substantial, but which, as far as the blood was concerned, contained an element equivalent to if not life itself, were most indubitably at the bottom of cannibalism, which in the beginning was a custom that, as an offering to the ancestral spirits, was in every sense sanctified. Yet it was not merely the vitality which was believed to be in the blood, but the additional vigour which it was able to impart to the drinker of it, that in the first instance strengthened the belief in the efficacy of a practice that had always appealed to natural man.

It is not, as a general rule, customary among any of the Delta tribes to erect memorials or mounds above the graves of the dead, the house in which the individual resided in the case of prominent chiefs and notables being the usual and only memorial utilised, while the cemetery, or "bush for the dead" as it is called by these people, is reserved for the rank and file. There are, of course, exceptions to this, when, *e.g.*, the New Calabar natives erect a new house over the remains of the late departed, the hall of which becomes an ancestral chapel in which is also deposited the "Duen fubara" or image of deceased, to whom offerings and petitions are weekly offered up.

The Ibibio, however, erect large monuments in prominent



positions, close to market-places or cross-roads, and sometimes actually on roadways that are close to towns and in constant use, but only in honour of chiefs and very distinguished persons. These structures are made of a wooden framework, draped and ornamented with cloths of bright and brilliant hues, and decorated with hardware plates and domestic utensils. Frequently, however, two small mud chambers with wooden doors that are always kept securely locked or fastened are built at the sides for the sole use of the dead man's spirit.

The Aro or Inoku too bury their notables in prominent places inside their towns or villages, the monument consisting of a plain and unadorned mound of hardened clay, dyed or stained black, which is raised over the grave. This invariably stands under the shelter of a well-constructed shed, open at the sides, which is always swept and kept clean, and offerings of food and medicines are regularly placed in two holes which are made in front of the mound.

Small figures and images, such as are mentioned above, purporting and believed by the natives to contain the spirits of the defunct, and occupying exactly the same status as the Aryan "Pitris" or "Fathers" and the Roman Lares and Penates, are also made and venerated by all the Delta tribes. Food and liquid offerings are regularly placed on graves or at the monuments erected, or the symbols that have just been referred to, for the use of the departed spirits (*vide* Section VI., in which this question is discussed in all its details).

## CHAPTER III

### SPIRITLAND AND THE SPIRITUAL EXISTENCE

THE spirit, as we have already seen, is merely the soul or airy essence after its liberation from bodily confinement. It is, in fact, life without the material organism, which is but a suitable or convenient form for this earthly existence. So the Ibo or Delta spiritland is, except for this loss, merely a continuity of the present, and thus, in the strictest sense of the word, there is in reality no future.

No reason is assigned by the natives for the separation of the imperishable from the perishable beyond the fact that their fathers and the priests have so instructed them.

According to these spiritual mentors there are two distinct worlds, this one and the next, to which latter all who have lived in the former go, without respect of persons or conduct. For the line of demarcation is not too sharply defined between good and evil, both forces being recognised as inevitable and natural conditions of existence, whether earthly or spiritual. Yet, curiously enough, the boundary line between this world and the next is much more explicitly defined, the vital distinction that demarcates them being the entire absence of death or dissolution in the next world, spiritland being a region in which only the spirit essence or life is in existence.

So it is that they have neither a heaven nor a hell, spiritland being merely a continuance of this life on exactly the same conditions, each country and community having its allotted portion, and each individual resuming the exact position that was occupied when in this existence.

There is, however, as we have just seen, one general

exception to this rule, which relegates the souls of all those who have not received the sacred burial rites—no matter in what form they have met their death—to a ghostly life of perpetual wandering, or it may be of return to this world in the form or body of an animal, and which confines to certain localities in spiritland all those who have committed murder, suicide, or other violent acts.

This, in spite of the fact that no specified locality is defined, constitutes to some extent the idea of moral punishment, and is not by any means quite so uneven as it appears, because the fact is taken into consideration that any untoward or untimely death necessitating absence of the funeral rites, although the work of some spirit (malignant or perhaps merely inimical) has been incurred by the absentee's own act in bringing its vengeance upon himself. In other words, these people, while not in any way understanding the doctrine of predestination, are to a great extent fatalists; and although at the same time they believe in the possibility of dodging Fate and securing salvation by means of sacrificial propitiation, when Fate comes in the form of death they accept it with all the philosophy that a belief such as theirs is bound to excite, for powerful as the spirit Death may be, his dominion extends only to the body. This he may slay, but not the soul.

Life is held cheap, for on balancing matters in their own minds these sons of Nature find it hard to decide whether the terrors they know are as bad as, or worse than, the terrors they do not know, but which they presume to be on a similar scale. Therefore it is that future terrors do not terrorise them any more than the possibility of present calamities, which are ubiquitous, and only awaiting the chance or opportunity to fall upon and overwhelm them. So, while the bolder and more pugnaciously inclined look forward to taking their subsequent share in the control of worldly affairs, others of a milder disposition, imbued with the restful principle that Buddha taught, prefer to seek refuge among the trees of their forests or stones and such material objects, in which they hope to remain for ever in rest perpetual.

But let us hear once more what friend Izikewe has to say on the subject of spiritland. "We Ibo look forward to the

next world as being much the same as this, the only great difference being that we will not have our fleshy bodies, and that it will be one of perpetual gloom, for there will be no day there. This we know from dreams, in which it seems to us that, while we on this earth are in light, the spirits with whom we converse are always in darkness. In all other ways, however, we picture life there to be exactly as it is in this world. The ground there is just the same as it is here, the earth is similar. There are forests and hills and valleys, with rivers flowing, and roads leading from one town to another as well as to houses and farms. Roads also exist from this world to the next, by which the souls of men who have died travel, just as they do in this world, to their own towns and houses. But the land of the dead has no connection with the land that swallows up the sun, for it is always in darkness, while the land where the sun is has always a light. People in spiritland have their ordinary occupations: the farmer his farm, and the fisherman his nets and canoes. The king remains king, the chief a chief, the rich man is always rich, the poor are poor, slaves continue to be slaves, and people speak their own languages, just as we know them to do in dreams. The same trouble and evil that is undergone in this world we will undergo in the next, for these things have to be taken as they come, being as they are unavoidable and as much a part of our existence as goodness and joy. There is, in fact, no difference of any kind, so far as we can see, except that certain places are set apart in this land of spirits for those men who have been murderers, or who took their own lives, or who committed other acts of violence. Regarding those who have been killed by violence, we cannot say what happens to them, beyond the fact that they are obliged to wander about and are never at rest, but we make no distinction between the good and the evil.

“However good or however bad people are when they die, if they receive proper burial their souls will go up to the land of spirits, for there is no allotted locality of any kind. For with us there is no very great difference between people—at least we do not see it if there is—and good and evil seem to us to be more or less very evenly distributed.

"In the same way too the souls of those who are dead are, as a rule, regarded as spirits who are capable of doing good or doing evil ; but it is usual to look on those who have received much respect in this life for their greatness and their wealth, and also those who have been correctly buried, as good spirits, while those who have been criminals and outcasts we look on as demons.

"Every departed spirit, but more especially those who in this world occupied leading positions, and particularly a head of a house and a chief, is believed to claim and to exercise authority over the fate of his own household, whom he has left behind him. Therefore his people consider it incumbent on them to keep in touch with him through the mediation of various gifts, offerings, and sacrifices, in order that they might so secure their own future welfare."

And it is in this article of their belief that it is easy to recognise the duality of their plastic and pliant natures and of their religious conceptions. For, no matter how well-disposed a person has been in this existence, and in spite of the fact that he has been on excellent terms with his family and that he is regarded as a good spirit, it is recognised that unless on the one hand he is propitiated by his people, and on the other pleased with the behaviour or attitude of his people towards himself, he is quite capable not only of neglecting but of injuring their interests.

It is not therefore demons only who are to be propitiated, but all human spirits—spirits, *i.e.* who have lived in this world. In other words, it is not so much propitiation that is required for the good spirits, but ancestral veneration, the neglect of which on the part of the living children is considered a sin by the spirit fathers or elders.

It is in this self-imposed authority that the key of the spiritual riddle is to be discovered. The two existences, material and spiritual, are in reality, so far as the people are concerned, one life : the former a probation of the latter, death being merely a necessary ordeal in order to effect the transition, or rather a connecting link between the two phases. So we have seen in Chapter II. the actual and successive steps by which the succession of a household falls to the son, and at



the same time, that by means of the burial sacrament the departed soul of the father assumes the immediate spiritual reins of government under the control of the ancestral deities, *i.e.* the still more ancient fathers.

In this natural way the act of death came in time to form a connection which—although it was one of separation, showing as it did that the human life was an existence which depended entirely on the spirit—grew or developed into an association the significance of which could only be measured by the supremacy of the spiritual. It was this dependence of the human existence on the spiritual that originally constituted the supremacy of the latter; and it is this supremacy which explains the fear, the subservience, the obedience, and the rigid discipline of the household in the flesh to the household in the spirit. To show how closely these two apparently opposite phases are associated, connected, but altogether confused in the turbid minds of these natives, it is believed that if an animal into whose body the spirit soul of a man has transmigrated is wounded or killed, the human spirit soul will also receive the injury in the same ratio. So mutual is the sympathy, so united are the two entities, so bound up in one affinity is the life of the one with the life of the other, that whatever befalls the animal at once affects the human spirit soul. Thus it is that all life, animal and vegetable, has within it the spiritual or living essence, varying in form and character—all, like the human, continuing their spiritual existence in the next world.

Between the spiritual element of the three kingdoms, however, there is, in their opinion, a marked difference that is evidently suggested as much by the difference in external form and appearance as it is by the internal faculties of reason and speech which make so distinctive a line of demarcation. Thus, in spite of the sagacity and intelligence of animals, whom they look on as the same order of creation as themselves, but on a lower scale, they rate the soul to be on a similar low level. While vegetables, although they have life and soul, having neither mind nor intelligence, cannot in any sense even be compared with animals.

That they hold, however, a still more distinctive difference

between the animal and vegetable organisation is to be seen, not so much in their belief in metempsychosis as in a cult called "Ehehe," which signifies the power that in this world exists among certain individuals only of transforming the human body into that of an animal, and *vice versa*, also the possession by human beings of animal souls. A comprehension of this weird and extraordinary idea enables one to grasp more readily the actual distinction between the two spiritual elements; for, while the human soul in the animal body does not in any sense alter the character of the animal, the animal soul in the human body at once reduces the infected being into a position of inferiority, *i.e.* it changes the higher human characteristics into the lower animal instincts.

This recognition of the interchange of souls before as well as after death to a great extent contradicts the received native opinion as to the superiority of the human soul over the animal, because an admission of this power of projection or transference is an admission of spiritual equality; but the fact that the power is confined to a very select minority, and that while the human soul in the animal body does not elevate the animal (except under certain special conditions and circumstances) the possession of the animal soul distinctly degenerates the human being, considerably modifies the supposed admission.

The soul, according to the ideas of these Delta people, is quite invisible except to those select few, such as the doctors and priests, who possess the power of looking beyond the material into the spiritual—a power that to some extent is equivalent to what we call second sight; but not more than one person at a time is able to see the figures of the departed, and spirits cannot be summoned to be conversed with except by witch-doctors. In other words, the spirits, as possessing the greater power, have it all their own way, and are in no sense under the sway of human beings, even the privileged doctors being merely mediums who possess a privilege, and in no sense any right to control over them.

But in spiritland itself, and among the spirits themselves, matters wear quite a different aspect. Here spirits not only summon each other for the purpose of holding friendly converse, but have assemblies and palavers in order to discuss the more

public affairs of the community, arguing, wrangling, and even quarrelling as they did in this world; unlike humanity, however, they keep their own counsel and their quarrels to themselves, imparting neither information nor counsel to those below. So that, from this point of view, they are inquisitors pure and simple. And it is to this fact, and in this article of their belief, that the ancestor is a grand spiritual inquisitor, who can and does inflict injury and evil, that the whole idea of moral punishment can be traced.

The Dibias or doctors are the only people who can see or hold communication with spirits, and then only when they are specially skilled in the mysteries of the magic art, and of charms in particular, through means of which they are alone enabled to do so. Those ghosts which haunt burial-grounds are said to shout and blow horns, and can be driven away from houses or cemeteries which they haunt by these Dibias, but even then only by means of certain ceremonies, during which they are of course invisible to all onlookers.

These doctors are always accompanied by familiar spirits, to whom they are said to be in the habit of talking. It is believed, too, that every ordinary individual, male or female, is attended by a guardian spirit, who is looked on as a protector, invariably of the same household, and with whom when alive personal friendship or attachment has existed.

Every freeman is attended by a guardian spirit, usually the spirit of his own immediate father, especially in such cases where the latter has been an influential chief or a man of substance. Indeed, the father and grandfather appear to have the strongest hold on the memory and the most direct, because personal, claim, consequently they are more commonly revered or consulted than the far-off deities.

When a freeman, however, is seized by people of another community and enslaved, he not only loses the more material and personal enjoyment of his domestic circle, but he is deprived of his protecting spirit, for the very act of seizure implies that his guardian has been unable to protect him, and that he is suffering for some former act, possibly in a previous existence. This means that unless he can once more regain his freedom he has lost everything, not only in this life but

in the life to come. Wife, children, and connections—his eldest son alone excepted—he might learn to bear the loss of in time and to replace, but to deprive him of his familiar shadow, of the protection of the ancestral shades, and of the family reproducer is to aim a blow at his hereafter by upsetting the even balance of things and turning his spirit into a vagrant and wanderer in the waste places of the earth. This is a thought he cannot endure, the very prospect of which makes him shudder, but when it becomes a reality it literally crushes all the spirit out of him and turns him into a callous and abject creature.

There are, of course, exceptions among them—men who do not lose all hope, and who look forward to regaining their homes and reclaiming the protection of their guardian spirits. But escape is not always easy, hedged in by the system of isolation in which these people live, and knowing little of the country outside their own environment. Besides, reserved as they invariably are for human sacrifice, especially up to 1902 when they fell into the hands of the Aro, who made it their business to traffic in slaves for this especial purpose, little time and less opportunity is given them for escape.

A common custom among all the Delta tribes is for the women to bury their infants close to or in the vicinity of the path which leads to the watering-place of the town. This is done so that the mothers, either on their way to or from the spring, may keep in touch with the departed spirit; and women who were especially attached to their infants during their life will frequently go and keep up an imaginary conversation with them for quite a long time.

The gift of seeing spirits is not only confined to individuals, but among the coast tribes, *i.e.* those who are in touch with civilisation, it is extremely rare. Indeed, it is confined almost exclusively to the tribes of the interior, but especially to the Ibo. This shows how potent a factor is civilisation.

This in itself shows that these Delta natives recognise instinctively that the Ju-Juism of the white man is too powerful to be reckoned with, while in no way admitting that their own is not efficacious, or that it has lost its mystic efficacy. To these curiously conflicting thinkers this acknow-



ldgment does not convey any loss of prestige, for the white men, although of the same creation, are a distinct and separate feature of it. It only means a judicious retirement and a more effectual concealment, therefore a greater isolation and mystery than ever.

The gift of seeing spirits is not confined to human beings only, for certain animals possess not only this abnormal faculty, but also the power of rendering themselves entirely invisible.

One of these, called the Ogo-mogu—presumably the chameleon—is said to live close to a river or stream of water in forests where the bush is big and thick. So gifted is this creature with miraculous powers that it can make itself invisible to a hunter, although he may be standing alongside of it. When it is looking for food, which it does by means of a charm it possesses, it can detect the presence of an enemy. Just as sorcerers do, the Ogo-mogu deposits this charm on the ground, and through its agency it is able to tell whether any human beings or animals are in its immediate vicinity. Hence it is named “the doctor of animals.”

Certain varieties of snakes, according to popular belief, also possess a very similar form of charm, a kind of stone which they carry inside of them, and which they have the power to vomit out when it suits their purpose. One of these species in particular, called “ajwani”—presumably the horned *Cerastes*—is so gifted, but the stone is either so small or so illusory that it has never yet been found in any of the specimens which have been killed. Resembling a brilliant from all accounts, the charm is able to shed a strong light, and being deposited by the snake in the bush, attracts certain small reptiles, such as frogs, rats, etc., which the snake eats, returning and secreting it when his hunger has been satisfied. This stone is round and smooth, blue in appearance by day, and is like fire by night. It possesses no healing virtue from the bite of a snake, but if put into food—soup especially—will keep off other poisons. It is in consequence in much request among hunters, who place great value on it, and wear it as a charm; for although it loses its power of shedding light, it still retains the power of attracting animals to any one wearing it. Hence for this reason hunters are invariably



on the look-out to kill the snake before it has had time to reswallow the stone.

Going into this question as deeply as I have done, it is quite evident that native observation of the snake has overlooked the powers of fascination that this reptile can exercise over its victims by means of its eyes. The power which, for instance, is possessed by the Ogo-mogu is a power the conception of which can be traced first of all to the principle that the animal creation is so much in actual touch with spirits, being employed by the latter as repositories, agents, symbols, and mediums, and then to the pantheistic nature of their religion, and in this way to its ancestral source.

Undoubtedly it was this principle of a spirit element which, though differing in degree, was common to all Nature, that paved the way to the doctrine of transmigration. For here we do not find, as among the Hindus, a highly elaborate state of development, but simply a system in which a natural transfer of souls takes place, or, as it may so happen, a mere exchange, appropriate or not, according to circumstances.

Interested as I have all my life been in the study of this cult, I have gone very minutely into this question, and have come to the conclusion that here also equilibrium is involved. For while transfer implies punishment, exchange is either an imposed or purely optional condition. So that the question of good or evil is in no sense an obligation in the latter condition, although in the former, as a rule, the transfer of the soul to an animal is reserved for people who are obnoxious to the community. This exchanging or projection of the human soul during actual existence into that of the animal, and that of the animal into the body of the human being, is but an emphatic accentuation of the pantheistic doctrine, the central principle of which is this: that the spirit is the paramount feature of Nature, dominating all Nature, including of course humanity, to such an extent that it is free to choose as its own external symbol any body or object, irrespective of kind or degree. Thus, as we shall see in the chapters that follow, it returns to earth from spirit land, either as a reincarnation in human or animal bodies, or as an embodiment in vegetable and material objects.

One of the principal peculiarities of the weird belief above mentioned is that when the human being is possessed by the spirit of an animal it is altogether against the will or the inclination of the former, possibly at the instigation of an inimical spirit, but due more likely to pure sympathy on the part of an affinity. On the other hand, when the animal is possessed, the human being, who is usually a doctor or a sorcerer, has the power of projecting his own soul, or that of some one else, into the animal, against its will presumably, with the object of effecting some particular purpose—often to bring about the death of a person who is hostile either to himself, or to some one else who has hired his services for the occasion.

In this way it was that the old woman of Utshi was accused of the death of Oru, by projecting her spirit-soul into the crocodile that devoured him, and not, as might be supposed, by converting herself, body and all. For the impossibility of this, in this particular instance, at all events, was clearly demonstrated by the fact that five other women were similarly accused. From the native standpoint it is possible for a number of spirits to be attached to one object, or to project themselves into the body of one animal, although it is, as a rule, unusual for them to do so.

The following story—as one of several which were related to me—will serve to illustrate that conversion is also quite possible; but it is limited only to those few who possess outside powers.

There were living in Oguta, not so very many years ago, a man and a woman, the latter being lame. The house which they occupied, and which contained some kegs of gunpowder, caught fire. As it occurred during the night the fact was not discovered until the fire had spread and communicated itself to the explosive. As soon as the occupants had discovered this, the woman, transforming herself into a leopard, clambered up the rafters, sprang through the roof, and got clear away; but the man, unable to do so, or to escape in human form, was blown up by the explosion which took place.

Another instance, which occurred at Duke Town, is of infinitely greater psychological interest than this, as it embraces

side issues, which assist materially in throwing a clearer light on those inner intricacies of the idiosyncrasies of these natural people. It appears that an Efik, by name Itare, was accused along with his wife of murdering their child. Speaking for them both, the former in defence said: "The child in question was our son, always sickly and ailing from his birth. Some time after he had reached the age at which children invariably walk he was unable, like other children, to do so, but crawled about on his stomach or on all fours, and during the night, when my wife and I were lying down, with the object of going to sleep, he used to lick us both, just like a serpent. Then I went all by myself and consulted Eban, the witch doctor, who has since died, and he told me that the child was in reality a water serpent; and he advised me very strongly to take it to the waterside and put it into the water, when it would once more assume its natural shape. Returning home, I talked the matter over with my wife, and on giving her the decision arrived at by Eban she at once agreed to comply with it. So we went together along with him to the waterside, and there in our presence the boy changed himself into a serpent, and rolled into the river."

Looked at from the standpoint of a European, the case, adjudged on the evidence given, would resolve itself into a pre-meditated affair on the part of the parents to dispose of a child that was useless, and a burden to them—a premeditation that, carried into effect through the connivance of the witch doctor, amounted to the crime of murder on the part of all three.

Let us, however, look at the matter out of the eyes of the natives themselves, and three points must be noted. In the first place, the fact that the child was a male, and as the only son the father's successor and future reproducer of the family, enhanced his value to an extent that has neither limit nor measure, embracing the dual scope of the human and spiritual branches.

Secondly, the fact that the continued inability of the boy to walk came to be interpreted as an obsession on the part of an animal or reptile spirit, which diagnosis was emphasised by his habits of crawling and licking the bodies of his parents.

In the third and last place, the fact that this interpretation

of the matter on the part of Itare and his spouse was at once confirmed by the local diviner, who seeing into all its inner intricacies by virtue of his outside powers, divined that the spirit in question was that of a water snake, which was anxious to return to its native element, in order to resume its own shape.

It is evident that the diviner's explanation not only tallied in every particular with their own convictions, but confirmed them absolutely and entirely. It is also quite manifest that here in this child the parents believed themselves to be victims either of a gross miscarriage of ancestral justice, or that for a former evil act, either of omission or commission on the part of one of them, this malignant animal spirit had either interposed, or had been obliged to interpose its own soul in place of the legitimate ancestral spirit, which ought to have been reincarnated in the body of their child.

Looked at, therefore, from this aspect, one course alone was open to them, and that was to get rid of the evil spirit who had brought so dread a blight into their life, and who by deranging the natural order of the spiritual succession of the family, had laid upon their house the wrath of their ancestors.

From the very beginning to the end these two persons acted throughout according to their lights in all good faith and sincerity. Indeed even that portion of their statement, in which they affirm that the boy in their presence exchanged himself into a serpent, is to be taken in earnest, and when analysed is in every sense comprehensible. For, as far as the witch doctor was concerned in the business, it was no doubt a simple matter of that manipulation which is able to deceive even the wide awake and alert senses of those who are always quick to see, and on the watch to detect any trick or stratagem, so that it required little effort on his part to mystify slow and simple creatures, such as Itare and his spouse.

Thus, it must at least be evident to the European that it is quite impossible for him to judge and condemn people such as these are, by a system of law and ethics that is unable to cope with conditions and circumstances which lie outside the limit of civilised experience, and which in consequence are absolutely incomprehensible to him.



## CHAPTER IV

THE RETRANSLATION OF THE SPIRIT INTO SOUL AND ITS RETURN  
TO MATERIAL EXISTENCE: (*a*) INTO HUMAN; (*b*) ANIMAL;  
(*c*) VEGETABLE BODIES; (*d*) OBJECTS. A GENERAL ASPECT  
OF THE QUESTION

HERE, in several words and under four headings, we have the identical principles that are contained and expressed in either of the words, metempsychosis or transmigration.

To get a comprehensive grasp of the whole, it is essential that we should dissect and analyse the spiritualism, which is not only the heart of the matter, but which, so far as I can see, has never yet been either accurately described or properly understood. Putting aside all outside knowledge of the cult, the first point that strikes the intelligent observer with regard to it, in connection with these Delta people, is that as believed in and practised by them it is, so to speak, a mixture of totemism and transmigration, in other words, as we shall see later on, a compound of two seemingly different cults, that are, however, in reality merely links of the one main ancestral creed. For while transmigration is simply the belief in the continuity and rebirth of the soul into other bodies, so-called totemism is but the selection by a clan, community, or household of a symbol, living or otherwise, to represent the ancestral soul,—in three words, “specific ancestral symbolism,” or in one, “symbolism.”

Having recognised that in these people the fundamental instincts which form the basis of their character are essentially conflicting in principle, it will next be advisable also to recognise that the principle on which their sociological system



is constructed is purely patriarchal or proprietary, an admission in so many words of the divine or supreme right of the proprietor or owner to do as it pleases him with regard to the disposal of his own property.

With this knowledge at our command, let us now proceed to examine the attitude of the mass, in connection, first of all, with the philosophical outlook on life in general, and secondly on animal life in particular.

It has been my endeavour throughout these pages to convince the reader that life, so far as these people are concerned, although naturally and intensely appreciated, is valued cheaply, or at least that it is not rated so highly as it is in civilised communities. This, when the absolutely precarious nature of an existence, governed by inexorable and unexpected conditions is comprehended, will be easily understood. Not only this, however, but the principle that life is spiritual, and as such continuous and recurring, is bound to decrease the value of an essence which, although mobile and fleeting, is all the same vital and immortal.

But, apart from these weighty and practical considerations, there is another and equally weighty reason that accounts for a philosophy which is indicative, not only of a lack of moral fibre, but of a supreme indifference and contempt for life, which in a natural people is not altogether easy to reconcile.

The explanation, however, is simple. Spiritualism, in a word, is responsible for this morbid and seemingly inexplicable philosophy, and the fact that this belief is not, as we call it, supernatural, but a going outside of, a departure from Nature, *i.e.* a revolution or something unnatural, explains with sufficient and explicit clearness its otherwise extremely incomprehensible characteristic. Not that in any sense is it inexplicable to these barbarians, looking as they do on life as the continuity of the human existence in that animated and undying essence which to them is the soul-spirit or the spirit-soul. A life that, although spiritual (representing as it does the ancestral type, the Spirit Father), so closely connects the human with the spiritual, that in spite of the dissolution of the corporeal body of the former, it is distinctly recognisable from generation to generation in the external features and form of the descendants.

This is their explanation of the transmission of those inherent, mental, and physical tendencies which we define as atavism or heredity. It is noticeable, however, that although to them the question is principally spiritual, much less notice is taken by them of the moral and intellectual tendencies than of the merely physical, the external, in fact, predominates over the internal. Due, not, as we think, altogether to a lack of intelligent and metaphysical appreciation, but in a certain measure to those glaring and conflicting inconsistencies that are so distinguishing a feature in their general characteristics. For, notwithstanding all their imagination in respect to the outside world, and in spite of a certain leaning towards the mere abstract, these people are too practical to indulge in over-speculation regarding mental or moral abstractions. It follows that the life of the animal world, as being on a lower scale than our own, is regarded with even more contempt, and that an accordingly diminished value is placed on it than is placed on human life.

The vital importance of this extremely salient feature relative to the comprehension of the question at issue cannot in any sense be over-estimated, for balancing on it, as upon a pivot, is the whole doctrine of transmigration, while it establishes, without a doubt, the fact of their descent being in their opinion directly traceable to the Creator-Father, and not to, or through, the animal creation.

Yet, although life is held so cheaply, and in spite of the popular belief in transmigration, while domestic animals are ignored, and the wild killed whenever the opportunity presents itself, the general attitude towards all animal life is one not so much of contempt as of absolute indifference. There are exceptions, as, for example, when certain wild varieties, as holding the ancestral spirit, stand for living emblems of their ancient faith; and in their conduct towards domestic cattle, goats, and sheep. That these animals were undoubtedly sacred, and are even to this day looked on as such, is to be inferred from their treatment of them. Anomalous as this may appear, from a European standpoint, these creatures, though allowed to run practically wild, are in a sense jealously guarded. For while the milk of cows and goats is never used by the people,

being considered in their opinion necessary for the preservation of the offspring, the male animals only are, as an invariable rule, reserved for sacrificial purposes, and killed and eaten—particularly the bullocks—at religious ceremonials alone. So that while nothing is, so to speak, too good for those animals, who, as carrying within their bodies the direct line of ancestry, have, as it were, every indulgence and due respect from the entire community, nothing is too bad for all outside the pale, who, in spite of the spirits they may carry, are at the mercy of all. So, too, on the same identical principle, it is usual to find even among domestic animals certain forms—sheep, *e.g.* prized in one community and tabooed in another. This is entirely due to an old-time custom observed by their fathers, most of whom died at some remote period because of or through these animals; and it is still believed that any person belonging to the community who even treads on the place that a sheep has previously trodden on, will die. So out of honour to their ancestors these animals are forbidden.

Formerly, in the Brass country, a man who killed a bullock was tied by his legs and arms on to two sticks, which were erected on the river bank, until life was extinct, while the slayer of a sheep forfeited his whole family to the king in expiation of the offence. Indeed these customs, which were also common to the Ijo, have not died out altogether as yet.

Among the Andoni likewise bullocks are contributed by the various towns as a sacrificial offering to Yor Obulo, their governing god; also towards the maintenance of the high priest and his chief assistant. Indeed as such they are deemed sacred, and on no account to be molested—molestation or injury carrying with them a heavy penalty.

From this standpoint it would most certainly appear that the central idea is based on a retributive, or perhaps fatalistic, more than a redistributive principle; although the mere fact that an inferior creation has been selected as representing a superior type would seem to contradict this. But when we recognise that the choice of the superior type was out of the question, and when we see in this, as we do all throughout their religion, the imperative necessity of propitiation, and the recognition that on it alone salvation depends—owing to the

inactivity of the power for good, and the ever-watchful activity of the powers of evil—then, and only then, can we appreciate the original idea and principle upon which certain animals and objects were chosen as ancestral emblems, *i.e.* emblems upon which symbolism was established.

It is necessary therefore, before proceeding any further, to register this equally important fact that the totem, certainly with these Delta people, is not, as it has hitherto been represented, a signification that its followers are descended from any particular animal or object, but that it is, as already pointed out, merely the symbol of the protecting deity, holding as it does the ancestral spirit. If it be the case, however, that the central idea of transmigration is based on the retributive principle, the conclusion, reasonable enough in itself, points to the inference that the people have deteriorated from a standard of morality and intelligence, which at some very remote period was higher than it is now. Reasoning from the deductive process, there certainly is not the general conscientiousness and intelligence regarding their religious beliefs, as must have been displayed by those who in the first instance initiated them.

For although they are still tenacious of their religion, it is only among the doctors and priests that any knowledge or intelligence concerning its motive principles and philosophy can be obtained, and even this is comparatively limited and curtailed. This is not due entirely to the fact that they are excessively secretive and reserved, and therefore unwilling to communicate, but that what they have to communicate is a purely personal matter, associated only with themselves, and in no sense concerning outsiders.

There are, however, still two other specific phases that must be examined before any general inference or conclusion can be arrived at. Taking the first, the fact that these people look on the animal creation from a divided standpoint, 1st, of veneration as symbolising the sacred manes; 2nd, as of a lower and altogether subservient creation, is worthy of consideration.

For while it argues on the one hand a common origin, indicating as it does in one given direction all that to them is



religious and moral, on the other hand, and in another direction, it points to an origin that is separate and divided from them by the inseparable barrier of speech and reason.

In these two, not so much conflicting as divergent channels, it is again quite possible to trace the dualistic element in the conglomerate character of these people. So we find, in a creation that is distinctly inferior to the human, a spiritual element that raises it to a higher and sacred level, not because of any sacred attributes belonging to the animal itself, but because of the attachment to it of the sacred ancestral manes, transforming the mere animal or object into an emblem which represents the protecting deity of the community or household.

That the whole conception of the question, from its initiation, is purely and simply an offshoot of the main ancestral trunk of religion, is quite evident.

It is not only conceivable, but it is reasonable to infer that when primitive society found it necessary to act up to its convictions, which were that the spirit fathers must be revered and propitiated, its members naturally looked about them for the nearest objects which they could see or find, in which the souls, or rather reconverted spirits, might repose in a position that was convenient, yet at the same time compatible with protection, therefore safety. That trees and stones were, no doubt, the objects that were most in evidence in these primitive days, as being more closely associated with its society, we may safely and reasonably conclude.

In the same way animals, as higher in the scale of creation than either the vegetable or material, were a rather later selection, and an upward development in the religious evolution—the selection again being due to environment, and in many cases, where an increasing clan was breaking up into separate communities, to the spirit of emulation, jealousy, or rivalry.

So emblems came into existence, one clan or community choosing trees of various kinds, another rocks, and others again animals, and so on, according to circumstances and conditions. Thus, although the above divergences would seem to imply a glaring inconsistency and instability in primitive man, it proves in reality that with a still developing intelligence, through the



force of a limited but arbitrary environment, which confined his expanding scope and left him little choice in the matter, he very naturally selected the nearest and the most convenient objects, those in fact with which he was most intimately associated. It is also admissible to infer that in certain other cases the original association that had connected the soul of an ancestor with some specific animal or reptile—a leopard or a saurian, for example—had been due to a certain amount of fear and respect, which had been caused by the voracity and the ravages committed amongst their ranks by the ferocious beasts in question. While the explanation in regard to more inoffensive creatures, such as a tortoise or a pigeon, for example, would point to the deduction that the former had always been looked on as an emblem of sagacity and cunning, and the latter was suggestive of peace and the mobility of the soul; these two selections indicating temperaments on the part of the communities that were either of a more peaceful or more intelligent disposition, or due merely, as already pointed out, to a spirit of clannish rivalries. That this was the origin of the idea, and that natural man or his later successors did not conceive themselves to be descended from the animals or objects in question, is to be seen in the whole attitude of these exceedingly primitive Delta people towards the brute and material creation.

This, in their opinion, although of the same creation, is distinctly inferior in grade, in spite of the fact that it was the work of the same creator from whom they are lineally descended. Indeed, as we have already seen, they recognise a very decided and distinctive difference between the human, animal, and vegetable kingdoms, which leaves no room for doubt on this point. Apart from this, however, the European who asserts to the contrary betrays at once that he not only does not appreciate in its true motive sense this belief in metempsychosis, but that he has altogether failed to grasp the essential principle from which it has arisen and evolved, namely, that the animal, similarly to the object, but in a double sense, combining as it does the primitive with the symbolical, is a mere external symbol of association that connects certain human remainders with their spiritual progenitors. The fact, too, that a separate

spiritland is allotted to each kingdom is proof incontestable, according to the belief of these natives, in the existing inequality and difference not only between them, but between the spiritual and this material existence, in which all three are associated. More than this, the fact, as we have seen it in Chapter II., that all human souls, until rescued from the land of the dead by means of the burial sacrament, and passed on to the land of spirits, are dealt with as having fallen to the same level as the animal creation, speaks for itself.

So that, deteriorate as they no doubt are, from an intelligence which at one time was on a relatively higher scale, it is not possible, I think—since they derive all the little knowledge they possess from their fathers—that the ancestors who originally chose these symbols did so in the belief that they had been descended from the animals or objects in question.

Much rather did they believe that their ancestors had selected them to reside in, because of certain near associations, that, fitting in with their own very natural ideas on the subject, made them at the time the most likely and desirable arks of refuge, or, as afterwards happened, of covenants as well. For do or say what we will we cannot get away from the fact that association, commencing with the first idea of the dream-soul in this, as in every development of human, or it would be more correct to say of natural life, has occupied, and still occupies, a prominent position in its history. So it is that among the religious ideas of these Delta peoples we find the emblems varying in kind from mere stones and simple lumps of clay up to trees and animals.

The second phase, which must now be considered, is the fact that the soul of a person killed by an animal becomes outcast at once, and the remains, if recovered, do not receive the burial sacrament, although they are buried anywhere outside the precincts of the proper burial-ground. This seems to argue that the act of death caused by an animal belonging to a lower form of creation, in other words, of a spirit naturally malignant (as having on redistribution been relegated by the power of evil to a lower form of creation), is looked on as an act which places the deceased on the same level as the spirit who slew his body. For in cases that have

come under my own notice, had this not been the case, the body or remains would have received the funeral rites that, under normal conditions, they would have been entitled to. Yet, strange anomaly, the crocodile that killed Oru at Utshi, evidently a spiritless creature in the first instance, was subsequently credited with containing the souls of no less a number than seven old women.

There is, however, yet another side to the question, which places the matter in rather a different light. For it so happens that a person killed by one of the sacred or symbolical creatures of a community is regarded as having richly deserved his death, in having, by neglect or misconduct, incurred the anger of the ancestral deity, whose myrmidons these sacred creatures are; and immediate sacrifices have to be made to the ancestral deity by the household to which deceased had belonged, and in the event of a recurrence of such deaths by the community at large. Indeed the popular belief is that animals or reptiles which are sacred never needlessly kill a member of the community, so that supposing a crocodile, *e.g.* to be the sacred emblem, these various reptiles do not kill even the domestic animals, much less the human beings of that community, and when they do kill the former, if common to the community, the offence committed against the deity is public, and in the latter case that of the individual. This applies equally to all cases of murder, witchcraft, or similar offences against the public weal, when the offender has to submit to either the ordeal of suicide, or of being thrown into a river that is infested, and literally alive, with these monsters. For in the event, which is practically a certainty, of his being eaten by them, or of drowning, he is adjudged guilty, and not guilty should he manage to escape. So that to be killed by an ordinary animal constitutes a mere act of vengeance on the part of the ever ubiquitous power of evil, while to be killed by one of these sacred creatures is a distinct act of retribution on the part of the ancestral manes.

Certainly no metaphysical explanation is forthcoming regarding these apparently arbitrary awards, beyond the fact that in the former existence such a death, being outside the ordinary course of events, is deemed unnatural, and attributed,

not to the normal act of the legitimate death spirit, but as that of a more malignant spirit, which would imply a further display of activity on his part among the household of the deceased, unless prevented or frustated by immediate propitiatory action on the part of the household. For in the eyes of these people there is no cure; but prevention is recognised as the one unfailing remedy. Thus in every household throughout the Delta not only is a preventative to be found in the form of a spirit medicine—*vide* Section V., Chapter V.—who is venerated as a household deity, but also a special god of prevention. So should a single sacrifice to the latter fail others must be made until the desired result is effected.

In this case, however, by refusing or denying to the deceased the sacred burial rites, his spirit is at one stroke handed over to the malignant spirit, who is thus propitiated. While the Creator, whether cognisant of the act or not, implies by his self-imposed neutrality, if not satisfaction, at least an unconscious compliance.

Here we have a distinct and striking instance of the spiritual—*i.e.* the fear of it—overcoming the humanity of the believers, because it often happens that a man so killed may be a special favourite with his family. Yet rather than incur the further wrath of the spirits, his soul is sacrificed as the only hope of salvation to the living.

In criticising them, however, it must be remembered that, in their opinion, the soul of their beloved, once in the clutch of the evil spirit, is beyond all chance of recovery, to say nothing of the ever-present and recurring ancestral wrath. Looking at the other instance, it is possible to see once more the veneration towards the ancestral manes which characterises practically every thought or act of those peculiarly patriarchal people, as being not merely one of intense sincerity and deadly earnest, but as a fearful reverence, that not only makes light of death, but which enforces it as an act of equity. And if we look closely into the matter we also see the marked difference between the two instances. For in the latter, the offence being distinctly immoral and unfilial, and therefore worthy of punishment, death is but a moral and obligatory act of



justice, which is approved of by the community at large; as compared with the former, an act of mere vengeance or evil, which, whether deserved or not, is regretted as a deplorable incident by the people, who were known to and friendly with deceased.

Looking at the whole question from their own peculiarly conflicting standpoint, there is only one explanation to this, and this is the law of "like for like," in other words, the Hindu Karma, which entirely pervades their human and spiritual systems, and which in an attempted comprehension of their idiosyncrasies, must be carefully studied to be appreciated. For this principle, essentially fatalistic as it is, is as much a part of their dual natures as is the duality for good and evil of that human energy which we classify as moral. So that to apply one without the other is to arrive at only a partial or half, therefore imperfect, conception of their manifestly conflicting character.

#### (a) THE REINCARNATION OF THE SPIRIT INTO THE HUMAN BODY

We have already seen that, according to popular belief, a certain proportion of spirits, who have recuperated their evidently diminishing energy during their stay in spiritland, are obliged to be reborn again into their own family.

This article of faith, resting as it does on the frailest support, the mere external testimony of the senses and of the internal evidence of the emotions, must be carefully analysed, when it will bring out certain salient features that ought, however, first of all, to be considered in the natural order in which they occur.

1. The first of these is, that this reincarnation of certain spirits into human souls—this reversion to the ancestral type, from a scientific standpoint—is evidently one of the few questions in which the dormant or self-existent Creator exercises his spiritual authority, though even here, as in every aspect of their cult, a certain amount of latitude is implied in the expression of individual desires, as expressed in dreams.



2. The second feature is, that the spirit souls chosen for this particular purpose are invariably those of strong and pugnacious character or moral stamina, especially those who had been excellent domestic managers, traders, farmers, or hunters, according to the occupation of the house, but not necessarily men of commanding ability or marked individuality. For, as we shall see hereafter in more than one instance, this selection or determination of a resting-place after death is as much an article of their faith as is the faith itself, implying, as it does, an implicit conviction of its principles, as well as in the existence and exposition of its two main aspects, animism and emblemism. For it is, as it were, not merely the confession but the practical expression of their religion, because if ever a people in this world have obliquity of vision, these Delta tribes, in the blind faith and conservatism they manifest in all their actions, display it to the fullest measure. And in none of their actions is their density more evinced than it is in this determination of the future. For although an absolutely personal matter of human arrangement, it is looked upon as a purely spiritual process, altogether outside the scope of human limitations, resting either in the power of the Creator or in that of other natural forces.

So that in their visionless eyes there is as close a bond of union between animism and emblemism as there is between the human and the spiritual. And, strangely enough, it is in this singular article of their faith that we have the key which opens out the whole question of naturism. Just as in the human life, so in the life spiritual, the individual soul is rated according to its intelligence. Thus although it seems only natural that the stronger individualities would be chosen as reincarnations, so as to secure positively, for a second time, the services of a capable personality who had been a masterful ruler, a powerful doctor, a successful mediator, or a long-headed trader, the issue in reality resolves itself into a question of certain unavoidable considerations. These considerations are: (1) the will of the ego expressed before his departure, or corporeal death; (2) the consent of the Creator; (3) the contention whether the services in question will have greater effect in spiritual or human form. As a general rule

the first of these considerations decides the question, the second is simply a mere matter of form or ceremonial, and the third is only brought into effect when the departed ego has purposely, or by mischance, omitted to make the selection.

In any case it is extremely doubtful that, if left to the family (as it would be in this instance), the family would select a human reincarnation in preference to spiritual mediation. For as the spiritual life undoubtedly holds or occupies a stronger, therefore a superior position, it is more likely that the spirit control would be held in greater esteem, as being of more value to the house than when reincarnated in the entity of some living member of the family, unless it so happened that the returned spirit-soul is reincarnated in the son or elected successor. But this, besides being a most unlikely contingency in itself, is, when all the personal issues are taken into consideration, a most improbable if not impracticable event. It is possible, of course, even after death for the spirit of the ego to communicate with members of his household through the very common and convenient medium of a dream. Indeed it is obviously probable that, thinking over such matters as deeply as these natives do, the wish in such an instance is often thus conveyed. But even in a case of this kind the more powerful the personality the more likely is it that the choice will alight on the spiritual.

For the masterful ego, especially if he has occupied the position of head of the house, is practically bound to return and remain in the self-selected family symbol as mediator—all the more so if he has been self-made and the maker of his own house—because veneration paid to the spirit of the departed is the greatest honour that the human ego can attain to; therefore the greater the personality the greater the honour, amounting, as it may do, to deification.

3. Examining the third feature of this question, we find that the principle on which this conversion of the soul into spirit and its reincarnation into soul takes place is on five separate grounds, viz.: (*a*) that life is continuous under certain human and spiritual limitations; (*b*) that the supply of the spirit essence, being apparently limited, necessitates these

constant changes—that in fact the question is one in which the supply is only equal to the demand; (*c*) that it is presumably on this ground that the spirit has to return as soul to this world; (*d*) that on the same principle it is an actual necessity for the soul to revitalise in spirit land, so as to maintain intact its spiritual vigour and vitality; (*e*) that on a similar line of reasoning it is equally vital for the sustenance of the human body to have the soul, as in this existence seemingly it is for the soul to have the body. For although in spirit land the spiritual essence can do without the corporeal, so closely connected are the two in the popular philosophy, it cannot on any account do without it in this world, or when connected with humanity in any shape or form, while in no sense can the corporeal do without the spiritual. Hence the reason that the body is obliged to have the spirit, just as the spirit has to be accommodated with a body of some kind, regardless of exterior or material. Disembodiment, in fact, implies the partition of the soul from the body, and from participation in all that is good or ancestral (*i.e.* all that is spiritual and human), and its consignment for all eternity to all that is evil, in other words, to a power without ancestry or embodiment and the means of detachment.

That the human-spiritual element is out of all proportion to the human-corporeal is not a matter that enters into the region of speculation, for emblemism offers them too excellent an opportunity of dispensing with the surplus. Reflecting on this brings us to the root as well as to the head of the matter, being, in a word, the main spring from which have radiated animism, transmigration, emblemism, and all the other religious channels that are embraced in naturism.

4. We have now arrived at the fourth and last of the salient features of this question of the reincarnation of the spirit into the human body. This, which is that the spirit when it is reborn into a human ego, as the soul of such, at once loses the natural powers that it had attained to when in a state of Nature, is self-evident and accepted as a matter of course. Presumably because its operations are confined and limited to a narrower scope, merely as a result of association

with the human or animal body, but in no sense with the material.

This differentiation, so emphatically accentuated as it is, is worthy of notice. For while the powers and operations of the spirit-soul have practically no limitations when confined in a tree, a stone, or even in an artificial object of the meanest insignificance, during its incarceration in the human body, notwithstanding this is gifted with reason and speech, its powers are limited to the strictly human. In a few words, because when allied to or associated with the material the spiritual scope is of necessity more powerful, owing to the greater liberty and expansion it obtains than it does in human and animal bodies—the existence of the latter being absolutely dependent on the spirit, while that of the former is utterly independent of it, a condition which also applies to the vegetable. Yet this, which to the civilised mind is an incongruity, in no sense strikes the natives as such. For in their estimation it is the will and the way of the Creator, both of which are mysterious, that are past finding out. In the same way all projections, exchanges, transformations, etc., between the human and animal forms, as operations that occur outside the scheme of creation, are miraculous, therefore unnatural or evil.

To refer once more to the actual dogma that is under discussion, this rebirth of the soul into the human body is not merely a belief, in the ordinary sense of the word, but a conviction, that neither argument, satire, nor ridicule will uproot or even shake. This dogged obstinacy in clinging to old-time opinions is not, however, only due to conservatism, that is, in the sense in which we employ the word. For, as applied to these natural people, conservatism is not simply an inherited tendency but a natural instinct—a relic of naturism—that is to be seen in the Obea and Mayalism of the West Indian negroes, after centuries of Christianity; also in the belief of the people of Niue, or Savage Island, in the existence and malevolence of evil spirits, in spite of their having embraced the same faith. But this is not all, for what in reality is so-called superstition which even civilisation, in combination with Christianity, has not yet eradicated in European com-



munities, if not naturism—a relic, in fact, of what we call barbarism? Yet the strangest part of it all is that the foundations on which the belief is based are as slender as possible, even when measured or adjudged by a low standard of intelligence, which in itself is indirect evidence in favour of its antiquity. For, as pointed out in the previous chapter, these are dependent principally on the physical and external similarities of appearance between the living or human and the departed or spirit elements, and in making these comparisons particular attention is paid to the existence of birth-marks, scars, cicatrices, defects, deformities, or distinguishing features of any kind.

In addition to this external evidence, the expression of the intelligence and individuality is taken into consideration, while much reliance (as shown in Chapter III.) is placed on the testimony of the dream-soul communications, in which the departed spirits make known to the corporeal their intention of returning to this existence, as well as on the determination expressed previous to departure by the individuals themselves. Over and above this, however, the feeling which weighs with them most of all is the absolute immutability of the creative principle, no other conception or solution offering itself to their conservative and patriarchal minds. So inflexible, indeed, is this conviction, handed down as it has been in uninterrupted succession for thousands and thousands of years, from father to son and from mother to daughter; that when an infant having a mark of some kind on its body dies, and another happens to be born with a mark in any way similar, or bearing the slightest resemblance to it, it is at once said to be the same child born over again. Indeed in a case of this nature it is the custom among the various tribes all over the Delta to give the child a name which implies reborn, or the return of the first-born, the Ibani, in the event of its being a son, calling him Di-ibo.

There is, however, another phase of this principle that will repay research. It is customary for these same Ibani, after several children of the one mother have died in rapid succession, to call the last born, if a son, Kia, *i.e.* countless, or perhaps he may die also, a name that seemingly carries



with it an implication of doubt regarding the tenure of his life. The Efik and the Andoni, who are distinctly connected with each other, take the matter much more seriously, however, for under the same circumstances among the former, the mother, after consulting and by direction of the Abia Idiong, burns the dead body of the last infant with a view of putting a stop to the mortality. Among the Andoni the woman, acting more or less independently, takes the corpse in a canoe and conveys it to some out-of-the-way spot, usually to one of the many islands which are in their locality. There, having collected sufficient wood, she makes a fire, in which she burns it. The idea, of course, as in the case of the Efik, is the same, *i.e.* to prevent a recurrence of early dissolution in the event of other children being born to her. But mark well the principle—also identical in both cases—upon which this act is based. In no sense does the fire destroy the soul of the child, for this essence, according to their belief, is apparently invulnerable when confined to the human organism, but it is presumed that the soul, when it arrives in spirit land—children being exempted from the burial rites—will communicate the fact of the treatment accorded to it by the woman to the spirit elders of the family. The object of this communication is meant to be a warning to the spirit members of the household, especially to those who intend to return to this world through the agency of the woman in question, to be prepared to live, and in this way to avoid a similar disagreeable experience.

Indeed an analysis of the whole matter reveals more than one point of interest, which throws much light on the psychology of these people.

First of all, it shows that the act on the part of the woman is a rejoinder to the act of the death spirit.

Secondly, that the act of the latter is but a react of some former act of the woman's.

That the act of the death spirit occurs at the instigation of the ancestral manes, also that the liberated soul was an unconscious instrument, is quite evident, because of the death being natural, *i.e.* not through violence or mishap.

It is, of course, also possible that the cause of death may be due to the death of some spirit affinity, or yet again,

antipathy, the former denoting ancestral wrath, and the latter that of the power of evil. In either case, however, it is an elaborate and practical illustration of the Karma doctrine.

But the most incomprehensible feature of the whole matter, from a psychological aspect, lies in the act of the woman. Here is no act of propitiation, but one of distinct and undoubted defiance of the ancestral deities. Here is no timorous oblation offered by a cowed and abject creature fearful of incurring the vengeance of the gods. Or yet again, here is no appeal, as when the Ibo mother, still smarting under the loss of her beloved offspring, confers upon her last born the name of Onwu-che-kwa, *i.e.* Death, wait a moment—a prayer, an invocation, and a petition all in one to the merciless spirit of death to spare but this one, and allow it to live. Or when, in a still greater agony of spirit, and abasing herself still further before the inexorable deity, she calls this Omega of her hopes Onwu-biko—Death, pardon or have mercy.

Yet, on making a still deeper analysis of the question, this seemingly defiant act is in reality a kicking against the pricks in the thin disguise of a burnt-offering or sacrifice to the offended deities of the body of her child, which on so many previous occasions they had taken pains to destroy. What is more, it is as it were a reminder to them that in returning to the human state, as a certain proportion of the family spirits are practically bound to do, they are, notwithstanding their greater authority and power, to some limited extent in the hands of its corporeal members while on earth, in consequence of which a graceful concession from them is all the more necessary.

Accepting the act as a sacrifice, as presumably the manes are expected to, there is all the same a dual irony in its execution which is certainly suggestive; first, because of its being made after death, and secondly, because of its being made at all, especially with the object of discomfiting the spirit.

As the only permanent instance of a practice of this nature, involving, as it does—to use the mildest expression—a tacit disregard of ancestral authority among a people who are so morally and spiritually timorous, so palpably dominated by the autocracy of the spirit element, it is all the more

suggestive and all the more remarkable that the act in question is committed by a female. True, as with the Efik, it is at the instigation or by the direction of the witch doctor, who, as being in touch with the spirit world, might justifiably be regarded as accepting all responsibility. This is not so, however, for besides being much too clever in his own generation to saddle himself needlessly with the indiscretions or misfortunes of his clients, the witch doctor is in all such cases merely an adviser, a mediator, or a convenient medium, so that the woman has to abide entirely by the consequences of her own act.

Looking at the question from their own standpoint, it may be that as women are on an inferior level to men, no serious notice of the act is taken by the spirits. But this, it is as well to remember, would make the audacity of it all the greater in their eyes, because it would be regarded as unlawful—an infringement, if not a usurpation, of patriarchal rights.

The position of women, however, among nearly all these tribes, among the Ibo and Ijo particularly, is not by any means so degraded as it is generally represented. For a mother, by virtue of her natural rights as a reproducer of the ancestral type, is, as such, entitled to and has a claim that at once perceptibly raises her to a higher position than that occupied by the unmarried woman or the childless wife. A position, in fact, that not only throws around her a halo of dignity, but gives her an increased value in the affections of her lord and master, as well as in the traditions and prestige of the household.

It is as an aggrieved and outraged mother, then, that she approaches the ancestral ones, and it is in this position, as one of the two human agents by means of which the creative principle and process of creation is operated, that she is accordingly dealt with.

This question regarding the position of women reveals itself more completely in the religious practices of the people than it does in any other way. This, in a few words, consists of the worship of goddesses, who are to be seen in every household or town in the form of deities who preside over the maternity of women, the ailments of children, and kitchens—

utensils as well as inmates. In every town in the Delta, but especially among the Ibo, Ibibio, and Ijo tribes, the goddess mother is always conspicuous. She is generally placed on the left of God the Father, either holding her son in her hands or having him on the left of her; all three of them are made in the form of clay or wooden idols—in other words, emblems. In the same way, in nearly every prosperous community, among the interior tribes particularly, where the women do all the marketing and trading, it is no uncommon thing to see an idol representing the spirit of some woman who, on her departure to the other world, has been elevated to the position of a deity by her household, and in some cases by the community.

The mere fact that spirits return as souls to female bodies is of course nothing in itself, recognising, as these people do, the necessity of co-operation on the part of both male and female energies in reproduction; but the deification of women is, on the other hand, sufficient testimony in disproof of degradation. In considering the question, however, the later idea of natural man, *i.e.* during the period when ceremonial and ritual were evolving, must be taken into consideration, namely, the possession, in a spiritual or animated sense, of both these energies in the form and person of the creating god. For it was on this principle, and not entirely because of man's greater courage and brute strength, that ancestral worship evolved out of the patriarchal system of personal proprietorship and property.

That women at the present day are looked upon as inferior to man is undoubted, but that their position is in no sense degraded, even when viewed from a rationally civilised standpoint, on the contrary, that in a social sense it is regarded with respect and honour, is equally admissible. This, however, depends to a great extent on the practical utility of women in a household—in a word, on the question of their maternity. For it is noticeable that only those women who are sterile, or who have passed the age limit of procreation, are ever accused of witchcraft.

The fact of the matter is that the patriarchal polygamy of natural man and the monogamic system of civilisation, based



as they are on the social principles of two opposite extremes and conditions of thought, are bound to be divergent in this as in all other directions outside the sphere of those natural basic instincts that are unalterable.

#### (b) THE REINCARNATION OF THE SPIRIT INTO ANIMAL BODIES

Beyond the bare statement that the ancestral spirits have from the very beginning resided in animal bodies, either as emblems or as a retributive and possibly redistributive measure, no definite reasons are advanced in support of the theory. Yet the conviction is to be seen all over the country: on the one hand, in the number and variety of animals that, as bearers of the ancestral shades, are venerated as sacred; on the other, in the much greater number and variety that are regarded as incarnations of malicious and malignant spirits.

To show the depth and intensity of their feelings with regard to this particular feature, when Efik or waterside Ibo see a dead fish floating in the water of the kind called "Edidim" by the former and "Elili" by the latter—a variety of the electric species—they believe it to be a bad omen, generally signifying that some one belonging to the house will die, the man who first sees it becoming the victim according to Ibo belief. The only reason that is assigned for this lugubrious forecast is the fact that one of the souls of the departed is in the dead fish—that, in fact, the relationship or affinity existing between the soul essence that had animated the fish and that of one of the members of the household was so intimate that the death of one was bound to effect the death of the other.

This death of a creature emblematical to a fishing community, or a community that has in its possession a stream in which the fish are sacred, denoting, as it does, the death of a member of the household, implies retribution on the part of the ancestral deity against the particular member who was unfortunate enough to witness the event. He is not considered as being necessarily an offending member, but as an affinity so closely allied as to be unable to avoid the consequences of any



act which affects the well-being or existence of the injured animal.

Every ego, apart from his acts, has a soul affinity whose every phase of existence is reflected in himself. In spite of the nature of the external body, any offence committed against the body in its sacred capacity constitutes an offence against the ancestral manes, for no doubt whatever exists on the point that the spirit sanctifies the flesh.

In the event of a death taking place in the household (a very probable contingency from natural or accidental causes), the deceased would be regarded as the undoubted offender; but if, in the ordinary course of events, this does not happen, there is never any difficulty in arranging the matter either with the doctor or priest. Indeed, it would be more correct to say that the matter arranges itself, for it is imperative in the interests of the public morality to uphold the dignity and the infallibility of the life-giving and the life-taking spirit father.

But do not misconstrue the meaning that these words are intended to convey. Do not in any sense regard this as a cold-blooded or diabolical murder, not even as a judicial iniquity, but simply and entirely as a sacrifice, offered in all sincerity, and in the name of natural religion, with the strongest conviction of its absolute imperativeness and efficacy.

It is the occasion that demands the sacrifice, and not the sacrifice the occasion—in other words, the ancestral one, who, in the name of the balance of equity, requires but a life for a life.

In the interior, among the Ibo and all the other tribes, it is in most localities customary to place a strict taboo on all fish and reptiles that exist in the various streams and rivers. This is done in strict conformance with the principles of transmigration, and the water is accordingly committed to the care of these sacred spirits, who, if the fish or reptiles are in any way molested or destroyed, are apt to retaliate by drying up the stream and as usual demanding the life of the offender.

An instance of this outrageous impiety was pointed out to me at a place called Akano, when I was on my way to Bende in 1896. It appears, so the people told me, that many years before a stream had flowed at the foot of the slope to the right

of the road close to their town. In this was a certain pool that had been inhabited by a crocodile. Unfortunately this sacred monster was one day killed by some impious fool, so the stream had gradually dried up and had never again filled, because the spirits were incensed that their peaceful tranquillity had been so rudely disturbed. Without making any specific investigation on the spot, a rapid survey of the locality made it appear that the depletion of the water was attributable to the diversion of its head-waters into another channel.

But there is yet another feature attaching to this animal phase of reincarnation which presents it in a still more lurid and realistic light, and that is the offerings which are made to these sacred creatures of human sacrificial victims. Formerly, and until quite recently, both at Ibani and New Calabar, the shark and the iguana as well were preserved and committed to the care of special priests, whose office it was to see that all criminals and sacrificial victims not otherwise required were offered to the voracious monsters. Even to this day, among the Ibo, Igabo, Ijo, and other tribes, among certain communities of whom the crocodile is symbolical, the same practices are observed in full and sincere faith that such offerings belong as a right to the exacting deities.

So in Brass, the pampered pythons, who were tended and fed with zealous and jealous care by their own specially appointed priests, were never molested or in any way interfered with, death being the penalty inflicted on any person found injuring them even unintentionally, while a heavy fine is imposed on those who cut down *piridigi*, a creeper that grows in the bush, which, from its resemblance to the python, is considered sacred. For such is the power and the grip of naturism that everything within its own embrace, even the nearest and most sacred ties of the flesh, have to give way before the demands of the spirit.

In dissecting this second phase we are at once struck with certain differences between it and the first phase in respect to supreme arbitration and individual option—a difference that we will find even more noticeable when discussing the next two aspects.

1. On making a comparison, the first differentiation appears

in the fact that with regard to this particular phase of reincarnation the Creator does not appear to exercise any active jurisdiction. Indeed, with the exception of those animals which are chosen as emblems of the ancestral shades, animals are not, as a rule, selected as a matter of choice by the returning or recuperated spirit. On the contrary, reincarnation in this particular form is undoubtedly one of the distinctive but self-abrogated prerogatives of the destructive power.

2. A further comparison between this and the previous phase makes it evident that while there is a partial expression of will on the part of the spirits to return to the human existence, there is practically none whatever with regard to animal reincarnation—the clearest and strongest proof in evidence of its unpopularity from every standpoint, but more especially from those of the punitive and derogatory. This is all the more confirmed by the fact that plants and objects are eagerly pre-selected by the living, and subsequently occupied by their spirits, as arks of rest and refuge.

3. Making yet another comparison, it is noticeable that the reincarnation of the spirit into animal bodies appears in some measure to affect the substance and vitality of the soul as compared with its reincarnation into the human body, which is expressed in the belief that it can be wounded or even killed through the wound inflicted on the animal.

4. Finally, that the vitality of the soul essence, or the continuity of life in the human body, is of a more assured and stable character, as it is of longer duration.

A careful analysis of these four distinctive features leaves no room for doubt that this animal reincarnation is a self-imposed penance that was inflicted by prehistoric ancestors, who were possibly alive to the moral necessities of the situation, but with a less elastic conscience than their successors, yet with an equally firm belief in their convictions, while the recognition by them of the fact that animal life was repellent and degrading made the punishment all the heavier. For we must not lose sight of the very significant fact that this dogma came to them from their still more natural forebears; and this moral system

of justice upon which it is based is the most important feature of the whole belief. For although, unlike the Hindu creed, there is no elaborate scale of punishments and rewards laid down, yet it is quite certain that the later idea upon which the whole fabric was constructed was undoubtedly one of even measure, *i.e.* of retribution. So it was that the omission and commission of every act was, by the authority and command of the ancestral divinities, paid back in coin of its own value to the ommitter and committer of the act in question, but not necessarily in the same existence, and certainly not always in the same embodiment. So it is too that the present or human existence is quite as much feared as the spiritual. For the oblivion of ignorance, like the darkness of night, and the doom of the unexpected in myriad forms, hang over, ready to fall on and disembody them at any moment.

Many of the more intelligent natives whom I have questioned on this subject have one and all briefly answered my queries somewhat in the following words: "The reason that many among us have for wishing that their souls may be allowed to pass into trees or objects made of clay, wood, or stone, is that they have experienced a very hard and troublous life. Dreading therefore that they may be reborn again only to undergo perhaps another life of woe and misery, they endeavour to obtain, by a rigid course of offering and sacrifice, and eventually to secure through the mediation of their ancestors, a spiritual transfer to those bodies which they have selected for themselves." For there is yet another important consideration that we must not lose sight of which altogether weighs against the disadvantages of confinement in a lower organism or in some inorganic substance, and that is the future prospect of being sacrificed and venerated as an ancestral spirit. This, in their eyes, constitutes practically the greatest honour that they can attain to. Not of course that every man of a household can hope to become its head or a patriarch on his own account, still there is always the hope that by becoming rich and influential, or that by having behaved worthily in this life towards his ancestors, their intercession on his behalf may secure him the coveted distinction.



THE REINCARNATION OF THE SPIRIT INTO (c) VEGETABLE  
BODIES : (d) OBJECTS

We have now arrived at a consideration of the two remaining phases, which, because of the unanimity of their principles, will be discussed together.

It is, of course, needless to remark that popular opinion does not in any sense assume any connection or similarity between vegetable bodies and material objects. For while on the one hand it recognises that the former is one of the three units into which animated nature is divided, the latter belongs exclusively and entirely to the region of torpid, *i.e.* practically lifeless, matter—living and animated only in the form of some particular and specific object when entered by some human spirit-soul.

Here, however, there is one distinction that we must at once take notice of, and this is that it is only the human spirit-soul and not the animal which animates the material objects—a distinction that carries with it more weight than at first sight appears, since it shows how clear is the line of demarcation between the quality of the spirit essence that respectively animates the human, animal, and vegetable, in spite of the fact that it is common to all. For while the human spirit-soul is at liberty to pervade all the different parts of nature, the animal essence only can interchange with the human, and then only in special cases and in a manner that is miraculous or outside the common or regular operations of nature. But the line of demarcation is even more clear between the animal and the vegetable than it is between the former and the human.

I have already called attention to the intense longing for rest which is so marked a characteristic in the nature of these people. I cannot, therefore, do better than give you the words of one Izikewe, an Ibo of the Niger and one of my very numerous informants, which illustrate his own opinion and that of his fellow-countrymen, and which reveal their inmost feelings on a point that is so near and so dear to them. "The people of Onitsha and its vicinity believe that spirits enter into



or attach themselves to various objects, such as trees, stones, blocks of wood, and pieces of mud or clay, and the reason of our belief is this. There are many men amongst us whose troubles and sorrows are so painful and excessive that they openly express their determination never on any account to return to this existence where men do nothing but seize and kill each other, but to enter into some immovable object in which they will secure to themselves ease, rest, and respect. When these people die, having made certain beforehand of the mediation of their fathers, they are allowed to return to this world and to enter into the particular thing which they had previously selected. The fact of these departed souls having passed into certain objects renders them sacred at once, and they are immediately venerated and worshipped by the people because of the spirit which is inside. In this way many trees are chosen, and our custom is that if any one breaks a twig or cuts a branch off he so dishonours the spirit and is certain to lose his life. We know that at Oko, and in other places where the people make large canoes out of the trees, they are frequently killed by the spirits who inhabit them. For the witch-doctors to whom the spirits appear and converse tell us that the spirits complain bitterly of the annoyances they are subjected to by interfering busybodies. For although they have chosen these trees as places of refuge to get away from the quarrels of this world, the people in it disturb the peace that they have not only fought hard to obtain but which they had vainly hoped would never have been disturbed by the offensive aggressiveness of those two-legged cacklers, who are always minding other people's business instead of their own."



SECTION V

THE SPIRITUALISM OF THE PHYSICAL, AS  
SHOWN IN

*A*, OBSESSION AND POSSESSION ; *B*, EXORCISM ;  
*C*, DISEASES ; *D*, MEDICINES



## CHAPTER I

### A. OBSESSION AND POSSESSION

#### POSSESSION BY SPIRITS OF ANTHROPOMORPHIC CHARACTER

DISEASES in general, that is, the causes of them, are all practically attributed to the agency of inimical or malignant spirits, but especially mania, epilepsy, hysteria, fever, delirium, or that kind of ailment which is responsible for any form of mental derangement, including the trance.

But while some of the various forms that disease assumes are the work of demons, others again are the work of the gods, which means to say that while in the former instance the infliction is one of pure malignancy, in the latter it is entirely a question of ancestral retribution or sympathy.

According to popular belief, although it is customary for the spirit of disease to afflict his victim internally, that is, by entering into him, it is also possible to afflict him externally from within, as in smallpox or skin disease, for example.

This possession by spirits, although not confined to any particular tribe or tribes in the Delta, is said to be much more common among the Ijo and Brassmen, and women are afflicted in a considerably greater proportion than men. These possessions—which are invariably made by the Owu or water spirit—may occur at any time, or in any place, and as soon as a woman jumps up and begins to talk a strange language—usually either Okrika or Kula—it is the first as it is a sure indication that she has become possessed. The fact that in many instances the obsessed person in her normal state is unable to speak the tongue which, when possessed, she speaks



quite fluently, is naturally looked upon as direct evidence that it is the investing spirit who speaks and not the woman herself. So, too, a girl or woman who through excessive shyness is too coy to dance in public, develops, when under the influence of the Owu, an excess of boldness, which enables her to do things that under ordinary conditions she would not dream of doing. This boldness is to these natives merely the confirmation of a pre-existing conviction that it is not the person that is doing these things but the spirit who has invaded and obsessed her.

It is further believed that persons so afflicted are possessed of physical strength which is altogether superhuman, so that when they become violent and uncontrollable they are scarcely to be overcome by half a dozen or more able-bodied men.

On one occasion it appears that one of these women, who was of a particularly quiet and retiring disposition, and who had become a convert to Christianity, was present in Brass at a service which was being conducted by representatives of the Church Missionary Society. Suddenly, right in the middle of the service, she sprang up and began jabbering away as fast as she could in some strange dialect. Finding it impossible to pacify her, an attempt was made to remove her. So strenuous, however, was her objection to this proceeding, that it was not until after a great deal of difficulty, and with the co-operation of no less than six men, that her removal was effected. It is worthy of notice that while in this obsessed condition, married women are kept away from their husbands, and cohabitation is strictly forbidden, as being likely, in expert opinion, to prove altogether fatal to the former. It is also noticeable that water, or starvation diet, and constipation are evidently encouraged, if not enforced, by the individuals themselves, as well as by the force of custom.

These women are invariably selected by the priests in their early infancy and pronounced by them to be the descendants of the water spirits called Owu. These Owu in a certain measure correspond to our mermaids, and the idea seems to be in some way connected with the existence in the mouths of these rivers of the Maniti, which is held sacred by the Efik and other of these coast tribes.

A very curious feature of this belief is that women who are so possessed are said to have husbands or male affinities in spirit land. What is more, the explanation which is given regarding their possession at certain periods, or on special occasions only, is that it is a question of sympathetic affinity, so that when the husbands in spirit land are either celebrating a festival or prophesying, the wives on earth are similarly affected.

Compatible with this strange belief these women are divided into two classes, viz.: (1) those who are possessed for purely festal purposes; (2) and those who have within them the prophetic power. As soon as possession takes place, or as the natives describe it, Owu-Koro—the advent of Owu or the water spirit—it is customary for the Owu to take up her abode in a plate of yellow or golden colour, or a stool, or in a carved paddle, an old manilla, or an iron pot. Whatever the article, it is said to have originally come up out of the water, together with the spirit that is inside it. When this has taken place the priest of the household or locality at once prophesies that the spirit intends to transfer herself from the object to a certain woman, who is mentioned by name. One of the manifestations by which the medium in question is usually detected appears to be the fact that her mere presence in a canoe, for instance, animates it to such an extent that it is made to tremble all over visibly—so violently in fact at times as almost to upset it. At this stage of the proceedings it is usual to refer the matter to a council of the village elders. No sooner done than the old men, accompanied by the priest and a single steersman, but no paddlers, put the supposed medium in a canoe and take her on the river. No movement is allowed, the steersman merely guiding the vessel, while the priest and elders discuss the point at issue; if a further vibration of the canoe takes place the water spirit is proved to have taken possession of the woman. This knotty question decided, the latter is taken home, and it is found, as a rule, that for at least three days she is so affected as to remain in a state of torpor or insensibility. It is the duty of the parents—or if a married woman, her husband—to go to the high priest, carrying the following sacrificial articles, 7 eggs, 7 small balls of native

salt, or potash, made out of mangrove suckers called koonu, 7 alligator peppers, 7 small lumps of Ibo chalk, and 7 small lumps of yellow dye, to beg him to release the woman from the spirit and drive it away.

Taking these articles with him, the priest goes in a canoe to a certain spot on the river—generally an island—and on arriving there he proceeds to carry, one at a time, each set of the sacrificial articles from the canoe to the shore. Placing these on the ground, set by set, he invokes the spirit, and then lays before it the petition of the woman's relatives. This performance over, he returns with a certain amount of sand and water from the island to the town. Mixing the two together the woman is made to wash herself all over with the mixture, after which, as a general rule, she recovers her normal state in the course of a few days. During the period of insensibility neither food nor drink passes her lips, and even after this stage the diet is light, consisting of sugar-cane, alligator peppers, and water. This convalescent interval generally lasts for a period of from four to seven days, until the release of the woman from the spirit has been finally effected.

During the whole of this time the medium takes up her residence in the outer hall or ancestral chapel of her father's or husband's residence, where she is joined by others of this peculiar Owu fraternity, who, according to the class they belong to, either prophesy or sing and dance with her, talking all the time to each other in a dialect which is not generally understood. On these occasions the usual dress is discarded, and a piece of white baft is tied very tight and worn round the waist, along with strings of small bells, which are put on the wrists and ankles as well.

Among men these obsessions are confined as a rule to priests, prophets, and diviners, and in these cases the obsessing spirit is invariably the special deity whose human mouthpiece or representatives the priests and prophets happen to be.

One of the most notable of these, and an excellent illustration of the entire principle, is that of the high priests of Ogidiga, the Brass tribal god, who, as soon as ever the spirit of his deity takes possession of him, begins to speak a very

different language from Brass or Ijo, but one that is similar to the New Calabar or Okrika dialects.

The first indication of the possession is said to be a feeling of nervousness, the cause of which is assigned entirely to the entrance of the spirit, and the next is the desire for immersion in water. When the event takes place it is customary for the high priest to starve himself for seven days, during which period he drinks nothing but water and enforces constipation. The immersion lasts as a rule from four to seven days, dependent altogether, it appears, on the will of the spiritual obsessor, and when this imperious and importunate divinity moves him to leave the water—usually that of the river—he is said to walk underneath it until he comes to a certain beach in the Nembe creek. Here he emerges, and lies flat on his stomach in the mud, like a crocodile. The chiefs of Nembe now appear on the scene, and have him carried to the Ju-Ju house, where he washes himself clean with water that is brought to him. He is then left entirely alone for a whole day, and neither sees nor speaks to any one, remaining practically in a state of torpor. On the second day all the people of the community, headed by the chiefs and headmen, come to consult him regarding the future of the country, bringing with them small offerings of spirits—generally a bottle or two of rum or gin.

His tongue being now loosed, the high priest, once more moved to action by the spirit of Ogidiga, prophesies to them concerning certain events of importance that are to occur during the current year; as, for example, the fighting that will take place between themselves and other tribes, the period occupied, and the ultimate result, also any accidents or misfortunes, individual or collective.

The object of this prophecy is to forewarn and so prepare the chiefs and people, also to give them the opportunity of performing the requisite sacrifice in order to secure the active co-operation of the gods, and so prevent the occurrence of the misfortunes. Before offering them, it is usual for the prophet to announce what the sacrificial articles in question are to be, for this is a matter which is left entirely to the judgment of the great and all-powerful Ogidiga.

During these possessions there are occasions when the



obsessing deity moves the high priest to disappear into the bush, instead of into the water, and this is explained on the principle that Ogidiga is an amphibious spirit; in other words, that the symbolic python is in the habit of living both on land and in water.

It is to be noted that in these specific instances the obsession is not that of demons or evil spirits, but of spiritual affinities, who merely affect their human partners with the same symptoms that are manifested in them.

This manifestation undoubtedly opens up for reflection certain issues that we must look into, which will be found to confirm the assertions previously made, that the spiritualism of these people is a feature quite apart from their demonology, which, strictly speaking, is confined to the domain of witchcraft.

These issues are: (1) the certainty that in their estimation the spirit world—reflection as it is of the human—is not all evil; (2) that apart from the duality of all embodied spirits, also putting aside the close connection existing between this and the spirit world, there is a distinct affinity between the two; (3) that this affinity is ancestral; (4) also that it tends in two directions; (*a*) for purposes—as we have seen—of festival and prophecy; (*b*) towards diseases, bodily injury, or even death, as we are about to see.

Regarding the connection of these affinities with the ancestral, even if sufficient had not already been said to convince the veriest sceptic, the admission of the natives that the persons so possessed are descendants of the water spirits—who are represented symbolically by Maniti and other living water animals—ought to be sufficient. For it is only possible to place one other construction on this assertion, which is, that they must be the offspring of an immaculate or spiritual conception. But as this principle does not obtain among any of these tribes, and as these Owu, under various forms, figure as local and household deities, there is, as has just been pointed out, but one explanation.

In no aspect of this belief is the ancestral more evident than in the regular and systematic obsession of the priests, on the part of the tribal or domestic deities, as well as in the



belief that in many instances the diseases by which people are affected are due wholly and entirely to the invasion of their bodies by the spirits of connections and near relatives who have already departed this life. Not necessarily through malevolence, but from a natural fellow-feeling—out of sheer cussedness, as we would say—and a desire to afflict those with whom they had been associated, but between whom and themselves no love had been lost, in the same way that they had been afflicted.

Invariably then, when a person falls ill of some complaint from which a late member of the household had previously died, the malady is traced to the act of the deceased, more especially so if the disease is looked on as unclean—*i.e.* evil in its worst form—and one that as a matter of sequence forcibly compels the ejected spirit to become a disembodied outcast.

Possession by spirits of either a sympathetic or antipathetic nature is not, however, any more confined to the coast tribes and water deities than it is to the interior natives and spirits of the air or forest. I will quote an instance of a case of so-called possession which came under my own notice to show how closely bound up is the life of these people with their home life, and how this in turn is simply a reflection of the spiritual.

I happened at the time, along with the late Captain Bartwell, the District Commissioner, to be staying for some days at a town called Nkara-hia, a locality that was much disaffected and opposed to the Government, and the people of which were very unruly and turbulent. With us as interpreter was Dappa Alison, who in my search for knowledge of native customs was always on the look-out for me. Attached to our entourage was a young woman, by name Naneta, belonging to Mkporebi—a town near Akwete. Complaining one afternoon that she was not feeling very well, she was brought before Bartwell and myself for treatment. Usually very bright and cheerful, Naneta on this occasion looked dull and listless, but beyond a heaviness in her humid eyes, and a rise in temperature slightly above the normal, she did not show any fever or other symptoms. Giving instructions that she was to have a dose of that live-giving elixir called Eno, to be followed by

quinine, I had forgotten all about the circumstance when some hours afterwards, while Bartwell and myself were engaged in conversation, Alison came in and asked us both to take a look at Naneta, as she was acting in a very strange manner, and in his opinion was possessed by a spirit of some kind.

Following him out of our hut we soon arrived at his, which was close by. The room in which we found the girl was not very large, and in the middle of it, on the floor, a bright fire was burning, so that although it was dark there was light enough to see by.

The entrance of three able-bodied men into a small and confined space did not, however, have the slightest effect on the girl, who, quite unconscious of our entrance and then of our presence, was standing in one corner moaning, crying, and talking, as it were, to herself; and although Alison spoke to her several times, and informed her that we were in the room, she neither answered him nor took the slightest notice, but went on moaning and talking. So evidently absorbed was she by contact with some element that made her dead to all around her, that even Alison, who was experienced in such matters, was altogether puzzled, and acknowledged that he was quite astray, for Naneta was not suffering, as he had first thought she was, from Ehehe, or possession by an animal spirit.

As I was standing quite close to the girl I could not help noticing that in the intervals of the imaginary conversation that she was holding she cried, and appeared all the time—so Alison informed us—to be begging and imploring some one called Tata and Atah not to flog her any more, and suiting her actions to her words she kept on writhing, wincing, and cowering in the corner, as if she was actually undergoing the infliction of a lash.

Instantly struck by this curious coincidence, I told Alison to ask her what was the matter, but Naneta continued deaf and dumb to the outside world, and the whole of her mind and personality seemed to be absorbed by that sphere of the great illusion in which the figures of Atah and Tata were the central attraction. Such concentrated self-absorption I had never witnessed.

This had been going on for some time when Alison's boy came quite unexpectedly into the room with a lighted candle. No sooner had the light made its presence felt than, without a moment's warning, Naneta sprang at the boy and endeavoured to throw him down and to wrest the candle from him. On Alison interfering, she said in her normal voice, and as if nothing unusual had happened, that the boy had no business to bring in the light, as it had disturbed her. The boy was sent out of the hut, and the candle extinguished, and as soon as this was done Naneta at once returned to the same corner and relapsed into the attitude that she had so hurriedly abandoned.

That the appearance of light upon a scene of gloom had quite broken the mystic spell under which Naneta had been labouring was quite evident, and what was equally evident was the fact that darkness or gloom altogether favoured and fostered the alluring illusion which had thrown its tenacious glamour over her. So tenacious was the hold, that Naneta continued to groan, to entreat, and to squirm for a matter of from two to three hours, at the end of which time, throwing herself upon the ground in an evident state of exhaustion, she fell asleep where she lay, and slept there until the next morning. When she awoke, beyond wearing a still heavy and somewhat listless and dejected appearance, Naneta was just the same as usual, but absolutely oblivious to the occurrence of the previous evening. In my presence, however, Alison gave her an exact account of all that had occurred, repeating word for word all that she had said, and describing everything that she had done.

Becoming, as it were, all of a sudden conscious of something that had hitherto been inexplicable to her, she informed us that Tata was her grandfather and Atah her grandmother, who had both been dead for some years now. Previous to their death, however, about ten years ago, she had been sent by the latter to gather firewood. Only a child of eight or nine at the time, she had played truant, and on her return home Atah, assisted by Tata, had given her a good birching; and although she had begged and prayed them for mercy, saying that she would never do so again, they had paid no

heed to her appeals, but had flogged her all the same. It was curious, she added, that she had no recollection of the affair last night, but she presumed that Atah and Tata must still be angry with her, and had therefore chastised her again. Nothing further, however, could we elicit from her beyond the fact that although Tata and Atah had been invisible to all of us, herself included, the fact of their spirit presence was indubitable, for her back ached and pained as if she had received a flogging, and she felt very tired and weary.

What impressed me at the very outset of my contact with these natives, and what impressed me all the time that I was in touch with them, was, as I have so often pointed out, the deadly sincerity of their beliefs, and the actual and positive reality—to them—of this inside and outside shadow existence. Three such powerful factors as time, association, and sincerity are bound in the ordinary course of evolution to have produced some strong and permanent effect, that has left its mark on the nature of these primitive people. Not that for a moment do I infer or even hint that the effect or tendency is spiritual, or anything in the form of a spirit. It is quite needless at this stage to discuss either the importance of time or association with regard to the transmission of human tendencies, but without taking into consideration the scientific antiquity of man, let us be satisfied with a period of say, 10,000 years. This period is at least long enough to have given association and sincerity sufficient scope to have developed out of a religious idea, first of all, an actual conviction, then an inherited tendency, so as to make it possible for the organism to feel, if it cannot see, the phantom or conception of its own imagination. It may not perhaps be strictly accurate to say that time and association can accomplish anything, but it is at least safe to assert that they can accomplish a great deal that is real and practical, more especially when the persistent and continuous influences of physical conditions, acting on the mental organisation, or *vice versa*, are taken into account and estimated at their full value.

In the same way, from a purely realistic aspect sincerity is a factor of great and undoubted power, which must be reckoned with, for it is not possible that sincerity and insin-



cerity can exist together. It is true, however, that sincerity is liable to be deceived, and that even self-deception is possible to the sincere; but among these natives, as regards the duality of their existence and the reality of the spirit life, it is not a question of self-deception but of self-detachment. For although, with the exception of the diviners and priests, who are the professional spirit mediums, it is admitted that the people cannot see the spirits (conclusive testimony in itself of their genuine attitude), so dual is their existence, and so detachable is the one from the other, that these shadow spirits of the imagination are ever present with them—to the exclusion almost of the human life—and they become a tangible yet invisible reality. Thus it was, in the illustration I have given, that Naneta's other or outside self was not only in the presence of, but in communication with, the—to her—real and tangible spirits of Tata and Atah, and that this circumstance, and this alone, made her utterly oblivious of all that was going on around her; and although this mental concentration was unexpectedly and suddenly suspended or diverted by the influx of light upon the scene, it is very noticeable that the influence was by no means dispelled, but resumed immediately the light was removed.

This tense concentration was due to a certain fixed consciousness of an event which, when it had originally occurred, had left a deep and lasting impression on a mind that was emotionally sensitive and impressionable, and it had at length developed into a constitutional tendency, through a repetition—such as I had witnessed—of the original occurrence. What is more, the death of Atah and Tata, far from reducing the impression, had only strengthened and confirmed it. For in their spirit existence they were to Naneta a much more tangible and dreaded reality than they had been in the flesh, and this reality was intensified a thousandfold through the feeling of uncertainty and the knowledge that, except on special occasions, these dread bogies were never visible. If it is possible for photography, with the isolated aid of the camera, in conjunction with the magnetic emanations thrown off by the artist, to obtain phantasmal impressions, which, from the practical experiments of Mr. Traill Taylor, and others, there is no reason to doubt, it is of course equally possible, among a



people such as these, living all the time in a state of spirit consciousness, to concentrate their thoughts during certain periods or occasions on certain specific objects with such real effect—as far as they themselves are concerned—as to receive a distinct mental impression of the phantasma in question.

In other words, Naneta, possessing a dual and detachable shadow existence—which is as much a part of natural man as his own very substantial organism is—had merely detached herself from her immediate surroundings into a purely imaginary environment, in which the scene that had long ago been enacted between Tata, Atah, and herself was so prominent that all her faculties were centred and concentrated on it, to the oblivion of all other things.

## CHAPTER II

### A. OBSESSION, AND POSSESSION—*Continued*

#### POSSESSION BY ANIMAL SPIRITS—A GENERAL ASPECT

BUT in discussing this question in its entirety, it is advisable to include the other faculty of animal obsession, which is so marked a feature in the spiritualism of these natives; and in doing so we must recollect that, although the power of conversion from the human to the animal is uncommon, the possession of the former by the latter is much more common.

I have with my own eyes witnessed several cases of this infliction, and on two occasions introduced them to the notice of a medical officer, but unfortunately to no purpose, and without in any way effecting my object. I say unfortunately, because they were golden opportunities, that no doctor should have thrown away. But where the spirit of science is wanting in the medical or other personality, merely technical knowledge is of no avail. Mere hysteria was the opinion pronounced by the doctors, on the cases in question—both of them young females, who, to all outward appearance, were normally in a wholesome state of body and mind.

In one of these the medical officer, without any investigation or diagnosis of any kind, merely took a casual glance at the patient, who was said to be victimised by the soul of a leopard, and then had the audacity to pronounce judgment.

It was not by any means the first of the kind that I had seen, yet, having the opportunity, I watched it very closely and with breathless interest. I was not disgusted at this so-called man of science, for I saw that outside the technical

knowledge of his profession he was soulless, science being to him not merely as dry but as dead as dust; but I was bitterly disappointed, I must confess, for, alas! technical knowledge—which to my spirit of inquiry would have been an invaluable addition—was what I lacked. Still, I observed keenly the movements and contortions of the sufferer, who, although she was not an epileptic subject, appeared at times to be more under the influence of epilepsy than hysteria.

Whatever it was, the conclusion I came to was that, apart from the organic cause, there was traceable in the actions and movements of this child—ordinarily an extremely docile and gentle creature—a distinct and independent mental influence, which transformed this rational, well-behaved being into a wild and irrational animal. But not only in her actions was this influence visible, for her groans and gestures unmistakably betrayed anxiety, internal woe, or sorrow.

I know that I am treading on dangerous ground, but I do so with due and becoming deference to medical science, yet with all the confidence that is bred from sincere conviction. It may be and no doubt is the fact, that both epilepsy and hysteria have something, perhaps a great deal, to say to the movements of these so-called possessions by human and animal spirits. Or, to put the matter in another way, that hysterical and epileptic subjects are more subject to such possessions, but that epilepsy and hysteria are solely responsible for the temporary displacement of the mental balance, and the disturbance of the normal physical condition, I do not for one moment believe.

For underlying these organic conditions, if they exist at all, there is a disturbing and deranging mental factor—an inherent tendency in fact—which is nothing more or less than the result of long ages of belief in the doctrine of possession, which aggravates the organic disease. Indeed, just as epilepsy is a physical convulsion, this mental tendency is a prolepsis or anticipation of a much-dreaded event, that in the conviction of the people cannot be avoided, and has to be endured. However or whatever its source from a scientific standpoint, to them it is but one of the many spiritual ills that the flesh is heir to, so that around the physical ailment this imaginary

emanation of human conception has twined and intertwined itself with such persistent tenacity, until it has developed into a hereditary tendency, which only time and a clean sweeping away of the phantoms of naturism can ever effectually remedy.

Or, there is yet another aspect to the question that is worthy of consideration. The fact of it is that with these natives, who are nearer Nature, *i.e.* to the animal or lower evolution, it is a case of atavism—of returning to a former state. This seems to me to be the true explanation of the matter, together with the fact that underlying the external phlegm of their nature, which is but superficial, there is a strong neurotic tendency that breaks out into a frenzy of excitement on certain special occasions, such as festivals, funerals, etc. Whatever the medical scientist may say, neurosthenia is no new and modern development; but, as seen in these natives, it is merely the relic of certain animal tendencies, the transmission of which has not been checked or retarded by the possession of increased intelligence.

Since writing this I have quite recently had the good fortune to read Basil Thomson's book on *Savage Island*, and it was with the greatest possible interest in the world that I read the following passage: "Close beneath the phlegmatic surface of the Polynesian, there runs a strong current of neurotic hysteria, often unsuspected by the Europeans that know them best. The early missionaries were startled at the frequent disturbance of their services by an outburst of frenzy on the part of their most promising converts, who professed to be possessed by the Holy Spirit, as at Pentecost. They gabbled in an unknown tongue, while their neighbours patted them soothingly on the back to bring them back to their senses. It was nothing else than the inspired frenzy of the heathen priests, who shivered and foamed at the mouth, and squeaked in shrill falsetto when possessed by their god. . . . To the same neurotic quality are to be ascribed that curious seizure described by Mr. Rathbone among the Malays, known as *Lâtê*, where, at the utterance of some simple word, as 'Cut,' a man will spring to his feet and leap about in a frenzy, shouting, 'Cut! cut! cut!' in endless repetition; and the curious affection known in Fiji as *Dongai*, whereby two young

people of a race not naturally amorous, being separated after a first cohabitation, will pine away and die from purely physical debility, or, as we should say, of a broken heart; and that strange surrender whereby a man who thinks himself bewitched will give up all hope of life, and will take to his mat and foretell correctly the hour of his death."

In more senses than one is this extract of deep and powerful interest, containing as it does so many elements that are identical with those which are so common a feature in the Niger Delta—which indeed, taken as a whole, with the exception of a few trifling differences, looks as if it was a picture from Delta life.

Taking each of the different points in this extract in rotation, similar disturbances have been known to occur among the Christianised natives at the services of the missions that are established in various parts of the Delta. In these instances, however, the frenzy and the jabbering in a strange tongue have not been glossed over and explained by the natives as a possession by the Holy Ghost, but as being due to obsession on the part of some local spirit, an explanation that, if applied to the Nieuve islanders, would without doubt prove to be the actual and true solution. This is all the more possible because these people of the Pacific, like the Delta natives, believe in possession by spirits, evil and mixed.

With regard to the idiosyncrasy referred to as *Lâtë*, and peculiar to the Malays, I have on more than one occasion experienced a similar element, principally among the Ibo and Ibibio, accompanied, however, with violence, and cutting about with a matchet or a sword. But acts of this particular nature as witnessed by me, although certainly indirectly due to this neurotic tendency, always impressed me more as acts of impulse that were committed on the spur of the moment, and not necessarily allied to, or in any way connected with, the belief in spirit possession. On the other hand, the emotion spoken of as *Dongai*, or the mutual sympathy or attraction of two affinities of opposite energies, as I should call it, is most certainly associated with it; and although this emotion is not in evidence in the Delta in quite the same form as it is in Fiji, it is to be seen definitely and distinctly in "the blood alliance" between



individuals of the two sexes, spoken of in Section VII., to which the reader is referred. While the question of the ego abandoning all hope, and practically willing himself to death, is also fully dealt with farther on.

When we take into account the fact that among most of these Delta natives—but the Ibo, as far as I know, in particular—the children of both sexes, as soon as ever they are able to prattle, are told as an article of their faith that they are representative of certain animals, it is not in the least surprising that the bare belief is sufficient cause in itself to produce the effect which the natives themselves attribute to animal obsession. For in analysing this matter we must be guided in forming our judgment of it by certain prevailing conditions, that must be duly weighed and considered.

1. First of all, then, it is not until the children have grown old enough to think and act for themselves that this Ehehe, *i.e.* possession of the human organism by an animal spirit, begins to make itself felt.

2. The infliction is not general, but confined as a rule (*a*) to people who display a highly neurotic and excitable temperament; if not, to those who are subject to hysteria and epileptic fits; (*b*) to members of the female sex rather than the male.

3. The fact that, taken as a whole, these natives, by virtue of certain specific inherent tendencies, acting on a naturally neurosthenic and inconsistent disposition, are predisposed to contract certain maladies that affect either the mental or the nervous systems, or yet again, both in conjunction.

That the infliction in question is primarily a derangement, and secondarily an arrangement of these two systems, and that it commences with the mental, is a matter that seems to admit of little or no doubt.

For it is not until the individual possessed has developed the powers of self-analysis and reflection that the obsession first of all takes place, but before this happens the nervous organisation is in the meantime subjected to a process of subordination, if not subjection by the mental, that soon reduces it to a condition of prostration or exhaustion. This mastery of the mental over the nervous is no sooner complete

than it is followed by a process of assimilation that is productive of co-operation. In this state the subject is only too ready to receive those particular phantasmal impressions which are uppermost in its mind. No wonder then that the impression of obsession by an animal spirit becomes to one and all of these peculiarly susceptible people a reality as tangible as their own corporeal existence.

No wonder too, that the individual so possessed conducts and behaves itself in such an outrageously animalistic manner as to lead the native onlooker to infer that it is merely acting in obedience to the behest of the obsessing animal spirit. Thus it is that the human entity temporarily becomes not only in its movements and actions, but in its disposition, a perfect specimen of a wild beast or reptile, climbing or crawling accordingly, biting, tearing, scratching, foaming, grimacing, gibbering, and committing destruction everywhere. On these occasions strong men are told off to take care of all such victims, and the natives have found by experience that the only certain way of keeping them quiet is by giving them raw meat to eat or a bone to gnaw, and water to drink. This treatment results in sleep on the part of the victim, and on waking there is no mental record whatever of the events which have taken place; a general lassitude is, however, always complained of.

Any scratches or bruises that are discovered on the body of the victim during the period of obsession are attributed to the fact that the organism of the obsessing animal has received similar wounds in the bush when fighting with other animals.

According to popular estimation, obsession of the human entity is invariably due either to a derangement of the natural order of things or a disturbance in the animal element, which implies the existence of affinity between the human and the animal organisms in question. What is more, it demonstrates that the animal, as symbolical of the household to which the victim belongs, is itself in possession of the ancestral spirit-soul; and this dual possession on the animal's part at once explains the native conception of its ability to obsess with its own animal soul one of the human members of the family, at the same time that in its own animal form, animated as it is

by a human soul, it can contend against its own species in the bush.

It is also believed that among those members who are so predisposed obsession is rapidly produced either from the shock of receiving a slap on the back or of having tombo thrown upon them; and from many sources I have been informed that in the latter case especially twenty minutes is sufficient to bring on an attack,—facts that go a long way to prove the nervous origin of the disorder.

According to native ideas, it is considered wiser to allow the infection to run its natural course, *i.e.* until the obsessing spirit withdraws himself from the body of the victim, as they have learned from experience that if preventative measures are applied too soon the attacks recur more frequently and at shorter intervals. Speaking from my own personal and varied experiences in the matter, if, as I have already remarked, this obsession is not a question of heredity, then the process which I have just endeavoured to describe of the subjugation of the nervous system by the mental, and their subsequent cohesion and combined operation, is the only other rational explanation that I can think of regarding this decidedly interesting phase of barbaric nature. But if there is no objection to it (and in the face of the unity of the human and animal mechanism I fail to see how any such objection can be rationally advanced, or at least supported) this very lucid exposition of a seemingly ambiguous matter makes it so much the more easy to comprehend. For, taking into consideration the facts that are included in conditions 2 and 3, it is very evident to the close observer that in the contest which supervenes in organisms such as have been described, the physical altogether gives way, and succumbs to the mental; and the fact that the physical organisms are organically affected or diseased only makes the combined supremacy of the mental and nervous systems over the physical all the more complete.

Associated with animal obsession there still remains for analysis the very important feature of cannibalism, and I will endeavour to show the connection which in remote days undoubtedly must have existed between the two. It goes without saying, that although in a still remoter period this was origin-

ally a purely animal custom, subsequent to the conception of the spirit life it became an entirely spiritual relationship, which resulted from the same principle and conception as obsession by the animal spirit, of which cult cannibalism was the outer or symbolical exposition ; in other words, cannibalism became a substantial and praiseworthy sacrifice or practice, indicative of the inner or spiritual idea.

The spiritual and sacrificial significance of this hideous custom has already been alluded to, but to gauge fully the peculiar tendency which, so to speak, led up to cannibalism, it is necessary to gain a thorough comprehension of this principle of their belief regarding the possession and domination of the human organism by the animal ; for not only is it possible to see in this belief a blind faith, that in co-operation with time and certain mental characteristics has produced a specific idiosyncrasy, which although subjective to all outward seeming is distinctly objective ; but it is further possible to see in the treatment which is accorded to those inflicted a decided acknowledgment of subjection, or at least a temporary concession on the part of the human or higher form of being to the lower or animal element. So that it became natural for men to eat the flesh of their own kind in exactly the same fashion as the animals whom they had symbolised as material embodiments for certain ancestral spirits. For although those obsessed still preserved the human form externally, internally they were dominated by the animal spirit.

## CHAPTER III

### *B. EXORCISM AND EXORCISTS*

WALKING one day through Ndoni, an Ijo town, on the eastern bank of the Nun branch of the Niger, I witnessed what to the uninitiated was a weird and fantastic ceremony, but which was nothing more or less than the exorcism of a malignant spirit who had incontinently taken possession of an unfortunate woman. In Biblical language, an attempt at casting out a devil.

Seated under a shady tree, for the afternoon was still young and intensely hot, were the chiefs of the town, with a large jar of the inevitable tombo (palm wine) at their feet, for devil driving is thirsty work. In front of them was disposed a small circle of sympathetic relations and friends, among whom, looking woebegone and miserable, sat the victim, an emaciated and attenuated creature. Between the two groups, supporting on their shoulders a slight framework of wood, stood four stalwart young men who, when they grew tired, were relieved by others. This, it was quite evident, was the object into which the doctor was endeavouring to entice the vindictive spirit.

Sitting on the ground, to one side of the assembly, his eyes sometimes on the ground and sometimes on the woman, but taking no notice whatever of what was going on around him, the doctor passed his time in muttering incantations and invocations, as well as in directing operations generally. He wore the usual paraphernalia of his profession, bags and gourds containing his medicines and charms suspended from a string which was fastened round his waist, a necklet of claws



and teeth round his neck. What heightened an otherwise ordinary appearance, were certain incongruous chalk marks on the face, and especially encircling the eyes, closely resembling a pair of spectacles. What was still more noticeable, however, was the concentration of his thoughts on the object that he had in hand, for, as in Naneta's case, this absorbed him soul and body, and for the time being this man lived for nothing else. But although the chalk marks gave him a fantastic yet subtle look, that, no doubt with a covert purpose, conveyed conviction to his audience at the same time that it distracted attention from his inner personality, it was the intense absorption of the man in the task which he had in hand that enveloped the otherwise paltry affair with a dignity and reality that excited reflection.

Questioning chief Danda, an urbane and pleasant old gentleman, on the subject, he informed me that the spirit had been troubling the woman for a long time past. So much so that she could not eat, and was gradually growing thinner, owing to the ravages of the hungry and malicious spirit. It was quite evident that she was wasting away from general debility, brought on by a total collapse of the digestive organs, but as I never returned to this locality again, I am unable to speak as to her ultimate fate. Judging by her appearance at the time, however, I am very much afraid that the spirit got the best of the doctors in the end.

The process of exorcism all throughout the Delta is very much as I have described it, the only difference perhaps being in the objects that are utilised for the purpose of invoking the spirit into. These of course vary according to the people and the locality, but they are generally confined to articles of common or domestic use. For although the actual texture and size of the object is immaterial, it is absolutely essential for the spirit to be encased in a material body of some kind.

The motive of the doctor in enacting the ceremony publicly is to gain the public confidence, and so enhance his reputation for honesty and plain dealing; but in the ordinary course of events publicity is not courted, except in those cases where the unholy influence of witchcraft is suspected. Naturally enough, our plausible friend the doctor carries his deceptions

to the extreme limit, and professes his ability to conjure the infecting spirit out of the patient into some sympathetic animal which is readily convenient; or it may be, if it better suits his purpose, that he selects a suitable object as a quickly absorbing and convenient ark of refuge.

In this way—for no bush cat is readier to pounce upon its unsuspecting prey than the doctor is to watch for and seize his opportunity, when Nature in her own inflexible, at times unreasonable way, brings relief,—he claims it as his own victory over the vanquished.

That the existence of hysteria and epilepsy among the people is taken advantage of by the priests and doctors is undoubtedly the case, as we have seen in Chapter I., with regard to the women possessed by Owu, but that the maladies in question are encouraged, accelerated, or in any way artificially produced, in order to obtain oracles from certain deities, through possessed mediums, is a point on which I cannot speak with the definite certainty of personal experience. That it is possible, however, and even probable, admits of no doubt whatever.

That the deadly sincerity of which I have spoken is not so deeply rooted in the priests and doctors as it is in the people, is perhaps admissible. Further, that these wily go-betweens, possessing as they do a greater share of intelligent subtlety, are quite capable of practising every wile or stratagem in the art of deception that is possible to them, is equally a matter of certainty. Yet full of deceit as they are, these slim personalities, anomalous though it may seem, are, as has already been pointed out, themselves sincere and very much in earnest, oppressed as they are by their spirit beliefs. Like all such fraternities throughout the range of humanity, they are, however, liable to self-deception, and surcharged with a greater intellectual audacity, which makes them impervious to the pricks of conscience, as well as to the actual unrealities of the situation. What is more, we must, up to a certain point, look leniently on their self-deception, and give them credit in full, or at least make due allowance for the fact, that living as they do in a constant state of mental concentration, as also under the habitual yoke of phantasmal impressions, it is not

in the least surprising—as we have seen in Naneta's case—that they actually believe themselves to be in the presence of, and in communication with, certain spirits. For by making a practice of the profession, and, sincere as they are in their convictions, their powers of concentration naturally and as a matter of course are productive of greater or at least of more pronounced results.

Remember too, that freemasonry is not more exclusive or secret over its rites and rules than are these priestly autocrats in connection with their religion. Intensely suspicious as they are, especially so of the white man, whose domineering or patronising ways and silent contempt they inwardly resent, and the disinterestedness of whose motives they do not believe in (and not without reason), they keep their religion to themselves, looking on any earnest inquiry in that direction as mere rude and designing curiosity. So that it was only by gaining the confidence of those who worked for me, and in this way convincing them of my sincerity, that I was enabled to gather all the information that I did.

It is of course quite admissible, however, that in times past, and down even to the present day, these convenient diseases, suggestive in themselves, have been and are made use of by both doctors and priests, and so purposely fostered and encouraged with the object of attaining power and working out their own ends.

If this be so, it is perfectly easy to understand how time and environment, working hand in hand on a rankly luxuriant soil, have engrafted on the original diseases of hysteria and epilepsy a mental tendency, and so produced a form of spiritual neurosthenia, altogether peculiar to these children of weird ideals and gruesome imaginations.

In the same manner, people of morbid constitutions, or those possessed of dispositions more pessimistic or highly coloured than their compeers, have been selected or drawn into the priestly vortex, either as prophets or priests, while individuals who combine with the art of deception a masterful and melancholic disposition take the initiative on their own account and carve out their own careers. In this way, the careers of many eminent local Dibias are clearly traceable, and

on the same principle the origin of the great Aro oracle is unmistakably to be traced.

One fact is quite certain, and that is, that only those who have the gift—*i.e.* in whom there are signs or tendencies—can become prophets, seers, or spiritual mediums. For if we inquire into the matter, it is, as we have seen at the beginning of this section, a question practically of affinity. But the fact must not be lost sight of, that between this class and those who are possessed of spirits—of the animal degree more especially—there is a certain specific difference, namely, that the latter do not possess either prophetic or magic power. For while the former is recognised as a distinct force, the latter, although also due to affinity, is an infliction that comes more under the heading either of a disease spirit, pure and simple, or in connection with the symbolism of the ancestral.

As far as personal experience goes, I am also unable to speak with any authority on the subject of trance, no single instance of which occurred to my knowledge in any of the numerous localities that were visited by me. This is all the more extraordinary, because not only climatically and psychologically, but from every human and natural standpoint, the soil is peculiarly favourable. It is not, however, within the scope of this work to offer any explanation regarding so abstruse and intricate a question.

But if catalepsy is not prevalent, the condition in which the body has all the appearance of having been temporarily deprived of its mentality, or, in other words, a state in which the mind is withdrawn from observation of things immediately external, to a rapt concentration of objects that are distantly external or seemingly internal, is common enough, *i.e.* of course among a prescribed class, such as has been described. That this is a question of the individual soul, in contact, however, with outside influences, is generally allowed. For even contemplation, so all-absorbing and centred as this, is looked upon as a disturbance or displacement of the mental equilibrium, caused by the influence or actual presence of some intrusive spirit.

Delirium, or mania of any kind, on the other hand, is regarded, not as the raving of the individual, but as due to



the energy of the familiarly malignant spirit—malignant with the malignancy of familiarity which, among these people, vindictive as they naturally are, breeds a spirit of revenge that, according to the mental faculty of the individual, is quickly transformed into active spirit forms, who wreak their vengeance by afflicting the objects of their hate. So ordinary madness is looked upon as solely and entirely the action of the spirit in possession, and a man so afflicted is avoided with considerable alacrity, and, should he be violent, with absolute terror.

On more than one occasion I have been present when persons have unfortunately been afflicted with mania, and judging merely from the conduct of the people concerned, it was quite palpable that in public estimation such unfortunates—especially if any violence is mingled with their madness—are avoided and absolutely left alone, as being possessed by demons of the most malignant type and description. Here, in fact, we have an excellent illustration of entire and absolute obsession by a disembodied spirit—hence the avoidance and the abject dread in which they are held.



## CHAPTER IV

### C. DISEASES

#### THE SPIRITUAL ASPECT OF DISEASE

THE ordinary malarial fever, which is so common a feature in Delta life, is nothing but the active presence of an inimical spirit, who reminds one to some extent of the Aryan *Tri-siras* or *Tri-pada*, the three-headed or three-footed, fever being personified as a demon with three heads in the former case and three feet in the latter, symbolising the three stages of heat, cold, and sweating.

The word for fever in Ibo is *Ahū-okū*, and in Efik *Ufiup-idem*, meaning flesh-fire or heat of the body, which shows the close connection existing in the minds of these Delta natives between the spirits that animate fire and those which take possession of the bodies of human beings, whom they are thus able to strike down by means of their own abnormal and specific heat.

Disease in any shape and form is naturally looked upon as the work of active spirit aggressors, and where it leaves external marks of any kind, such as those left by smallpox, for example, it is not only loathed but feared.

Here again, if we look into it, we will find that the underlying principle of much of the spiritualism of naturism is an unreasoning and terrifying fear of consequences and of disfigurement, present and future. For much that is material is blended with the actual and purely spiritual, and a disfigurement that may be carried into the darker side of spirit life is almost as much dreaded as death, since it is a bar sinister to the ancestral

spirit land. So various diseases have been personified in the form of malignant demons that not only feed upon and eat away the flesh, but who would destroy the soul, or at least transform it into a demon as vicious as themselves. When, therefore, smallpox first breaks out in a town, a special doctor with a local reputation for medicine, *i.e.* a preparation which is spiritualised and that is proof against its ravages, is at once called in.

If in reality his medicine is of no consequence (that is, from a European standpoint), the doctor, as far as the natives are concerned, is at least a specialist as regards the inmost appetites and idiosyncrasies of the local gods. So with his eyes—markedly be-ringed with the sacred chalk—fixed on the inevitable, as soon as ever he arrives in the town he asks for the sacrificial articles to be brought to him. In this particular case these as a rule consist of white baft, chalk, yellow wood, a goat, and some fowls. Offering the former and sacrificing the latter (for, be it remembered, every medicine to be of any use must have within it a spiritual essence to defeat the operations of the aggressive invader), he then issues to every individual inhabitant a circlet, which is made by twisting or plaiting together certain fibres from the tombo palm or other fibrous plants, and these circlets are religiously worn round the head, the neck, the wrists, and the ankles, in the firm belief that the spirit of the medicine will keep the spirit of the disease from attacking and infecting the wearers. When, however, it fails to do this, the latter spirit has simply vanquished the former; the spirit of the disease has been too strong for the spirit of the doctor's medicine.

Early in the year 1900 I happened to be paying a visit to the Brass river, and among other topics was discussing trade prospects with some of the chiefs. These, according to James Spiff, a well-informed and intelligent man, did not promise to be favourable, because, he informed me, the producers—in this case Ijo—instead of cutting down the nuts from the oil palms, as they ought long since to have done, were busy all over the country making great plays and feasts in honour of the Long Ju-Ju (the Aro Chuku, or god of the Aro) for having prevailed over the smallpox.

On proceeding up the Niger river a few days afterwards I made further inquiry into the matter among the Ijo themselves, and found his statement to be perfectly correct. Some sporadic, or, what is more likely, suspicious cases of smallpox having occurred in certain localities, and the popular faith in local medicines having evidently been shaken through previous experience, the aid of the celebrated divining god had been invoked, with such excellent effect that the smallpox fiend had been driven headlong out of the field.

To show how ingrained is the naturism of these natives, and further, how ineradicable it is, on another occasion, many years ago now, I believe, an epidemic of smallpox swept through the Brass country, causing great havoc and consternation among the people. Just previous to this, one of the chiefs (a man who had received a certain amount of education, and who had then recently embraced Christianity) had, contrary to the Brass laws, planted one of his farms with yams. This, it appears, was in direct opposition to their ancestral traditions, which prohibited the cultivation of certain articles of food. Yams (which were usually supplied from Onitsha, on the Niger, and neighbourhood) were specially forbidden, for the natives believed that it was their destiny to be buyers of food and not planters—a belief that of late years has been considerably modified owing to the force of circumstances.

The high priest and his assistants, unable to stem the spread of the disease, and having, it is presumed, no better solution to offer regarding the cause of it, divined that the chief in question, by planting yams, had so transgressed the laws of the gods that they in return for his offence, and the almost equivalent offence of the king and chiefs in permitting it, had punished the entire tribe. No time was lost in compelling the offender on pain of death to comply with the necessary ceremonial of propitiation to the outraged deities. Escaping eventually, however, from Nembe, he claimed protection from the English Consul through the European agents, whose factories were at the mouth of the Brass river. All the same, he was obliged to give up all ideas of farming on the scale that he had originally intended, until the administration of the

Niger coast was taken over by the British Government some twenty years afterwards.

But while in connection with this question of disease there are no further individual features of importance demanding the reader's notice, I would, however, here call his attention to one particular experience, which is most certainly worth registering. This is the extraordinary tenacity of purpose that characterises these natural people under certain physical conditions that affect the health or well-being of the ego, and it is of special interest in connection with the question under discussion regarding the spirituality of the material.

Nine hundred and ninety-nine Europeans out of a thousand would define this special characteristic as due to pure obstinacy or sheer superstition; but the European, as invariably where natural man is concerned, is mistaken. What to his artificial mind appears as mere obstinacy—the result of sheer stupid ignorance—is due, not to any special fixity of opinion or unyielding resolution, but to a mental tendency that is constantly producing and reproducing itself in phantasmal impressions, which, although they are subjective, convey to the mind of natural man an objective reality.

That the origin of this tendency is purely neurotic, and that it dates far back into the antiquity of the ages, is quite a reasonable suggestion. For with them it can be traced back to the subjection of the human by the spiritual, and the impossibility of separating one from the other. And this at once explains the otherwise incomprehensible attitude of these natives, when, from the standpoint of the onlooker, they fall ill all of a sudden, and with no seeming reason, and suffer from debility or other ailments without obtaining relief from local doctors and medicines. Many cases, very similar to that of the Ijo woman mentioned in the previous chapter, have come under my notice, in which the patients, some of whom were attended by European physicians, have wasted away and died, to all appearance from no radical cause.

Although it is not for me to say that in none of these instances was death due to any specific ailment, from which it was supposed that they were suffering, I must state it as my deliberate opinion that had it not been for the tendency



referred to, one and all of them would most certainly have recovered. The individual cause of death, in other words, was due to nothing more or less than the will of the ego to die, made up with a fixity of purpose that was unalterable. Indeed it was evident, *i.e.* at least as far as one could judge, that this devitalising force, acting on constitutions that were seemingly run down or debilitated, but in which, according to the diagnosis of European doctors, there were no symptoms of organic disease, combined with want of nourishment, was the cause from which they eventually succumbed.

The only explanation of what we would call sheer stubbornness is the fact that in the minds of the natives the disease in question is attributed to the influence and active operations of some malignant demon. So rooted indeed is this belief that cases are of an everyday occurrence in which persons who, up to a certain point, were in a perfectly sound state of health, have developed an unknown malady (quite apart from slow or other forms of poison), and gone from bad to worse, and finally to death, believing themselves to be under the spell of some malign influence.

That this neurotic tendency, if not a developed instinct, is practically one and the same thing, by virtue of a time association, is to be seen in the fact of its imperviousness to change of any kind, even to that of religious conversion, which strikes down to the very roots of human nature. So we find that the fiery and fanatical religion of Mohammed has no more effect on it than the milder formulas of Christianity. For the Yoruba and the Haussa, who are much older Mohammedans than the former, are quite as natural or superstitious as any of the Delta natives. Indeed I have seen more than one hardened old Haussa soldier dying steadily and by inches, because he believed himself to be bewitched; so that no nourishment or medicines that were given to him had the slightest effect either to check the mischief or to improve his condition in any way, and nothing was able to divert him from a fate which he considered inevitable.

In the same way, and under very similar conditions, I have seen Kru-men and others die, in spite of every effort that was made to save them, simply because they had made up their



minds, not (as we thought at the time) to die, but that being in the clutch of malignant demons they were bound to die. For the most distinctive, as it is the most significant, feature about this peculiar malady is the utter extinction of hope, which not only disproves the old adage that "while there's life there's hope," but which is a standing testimony as to the hopeless and incurable nature of such cases.

One case, that of a young Ibo, which at the time made a great impression on me, is perhaps worth recording. Syama was the father of two nice little children, to whom he was exceedingly attached, but he lost first one and then, not very long after, the other, in spite of the fact that every effort to save them was made by a doctor of more than local reputation. The loss of the first child affected him beyond measure, and from a cheerful man he grew disconsolate and brooded over his loss; but when the second died all hope and pleasure in life seemed to die with it, for he became to all appearance not only broken-hearted, as we term it, but as if he had given up all interest in life. Evil, in the guise of witchcraft, had got him into its clutches, and having robbed him of his sons, *i.e.* the successors and reproducers of the family in the flesh, and the reincarnations of the spirits ancestral, had made a break in the circle, and not content with this was bent upon enlarging the gap by robbing him of his own life. So this now hopeless unfortunate, who had once been full of hope and promise, took to consulting diviners and deities whose powers were celebrated beyond the narrow confines of their ancestral limitations; but even the great and infallible god of the wily Aro was unable to comfort or console him. For the demon of despair—to those people a living cannibalistic reality—had got hold of him with a vengeance. So much so, that he gradually wasted away and shrank visibly into a living skeleton, and from this again to the void and seeming nothingness of nature, to fulfil in his turn the behests of that inscrutable and inflexible principle which preserves the balance in one continuous cycle of act and react.

In the Brass district suicide is quite a common occurrence, and one of the commonest forms in use is that which is known as holding the breath, the literal translation of the native

term. This is done with so much determination and so effectually as invariably to result in death. Looked upon, as this form of death is by some few of the more intelligent and educated chiefs, as a deliberate act of self-murder, it is on analysis unquestionably identical with the derangement which originates from the impression that the personality is afflicted by malign influences. For it generally occurs either among Brass people who have been sold or turned out of their country, or, in many cases, among slaves who as freeborns in their own country have been acquired by Brass chiefs. Several instances of this nature (an aggravated form of nostalgia, from a European standpoint) have come under my own notice in which people have refused to eat, drink, or to stir from one position (usually prone on the flat of the stomach), until they have literally pined or fretted themselves to death, *i.e.* in the native estimation died by enforced suffocation. One case of the violent type occurs to me, of a Brass man called Undi, who was well known to me. An exemplary character, a hard and steady worker as a canoe-builder, by which he made quite a good livelihood, he was always unhappy because he was not allowed to return to his home, from which it appears he had been exiled—an unhappiness which culminated at last in an attempt to shoot himself. Proving unsuccessful, as it did, owing to the able medical treatment he received from Dr. Meeke, the Medical Officer at Opobo, Undi informed me in a quiet, but none the less pathetic manner, that as he could not get back to his people he had no wish whatever to live, all the more so because the tree spirits who lived in the bush where he made his canoes were hostile to him, and he feared that they would take his life. Interpreted from the native aspect, it is clear that the poor fellow thought himself possessed by one of these wood spirits, who were angry with him because he had cut down some trees and disturbed them—an idea that was fostered by the fact that they belonged to another tribe, and the hope that if he could not go back to Brass in the flesh he might get back to it in the spirit, and so pay off old scores.

Among the Ijo suicide of the violent kind is also very common. A very excitable, passionate, and quarrelsome race, not only with strangers, but among themselves, they will

commit self-murder on the slightest provocation, even when they have been only abused or chaffed. So on one occasion, while I was at a place called Utshi on the Niger, a labourer working for the Niger Company, simply because of something his wife had said to him in the morning, promptly set to work and drank two bottles of gin, and by the evening his body was found hanging to a beam in the hut, quite dead.

In another case that occurred at Eket, an Ijo Court messenger, or policeman, in the service of the Government, by name Apolli, had formed, so it seems, an attachment to an Ibibio woman called Asam, living in the twin-town close by. This was quite in accordance with the local laws, which, however, recognises the mother and the offspring resulting from such intercourse as the property of the husband. Notwithstanding this, however, Apolli was most anxious to take Asam back with him to his own country, and made strenuous efforts to persuade her to that effect; but on her refusing to contract a blood alliance—*i.e.* a covenant which is for ever binding, that consists in reciprocal blood-letting and licking from the arm—he first of all deliberately shot the woman with his rifle, and then put an end to his own existence.

Another distinctly luminous occurrence that also came within my jurisdiction—exemplifying as it does the sensitive and phenomenally impulsive nature of these natural people—deserves notice. This took place at Old Calabar, where an Efik youth belonging to one of the big chiefs quietly retired into the bush and took his own life, because he had been accused of theft from one of the factories.

Among the Ibo particularly the act of suicide is looked on with manifest deprecation and horror. It is not of common occurrence, and when it does happen there is invariably a difference of opinion among the people—the minority exonerating it as an act of bravery and large-heartedness, the majority condemning it as a piece of folly. It is generally spoken of as a devilish or evil death, which shows clearly and unmistakably the true trend of popular opinion. It is also regarded as the retributive justice of God, upon what

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they call land-pollution, *i.e.* of those people who are not at peace with themselves or their neighbours, and who, maintaining a persistent attitude of evil, avail themselves of every opportunity by which they can commit an offence against the land and their fellow-men.

## CHAPTER V

### D. MEDICINES

#### THE SPIRITUAL ASPECT OF MEDICINES AND THE MATERIAL DISPENSATION OF IT BY THE DOCTORS

JUST as disease is simply a question of spirit obsession, so medicine, evidently an invention of the faculty that doctors and divines, is entirely spirit-possessed matter.

Medicines vary with diseases and the purposes for which they are prepared. Among a people who are essentially natural, whose naturism is their religion and their life, medicines, all of which are derived from Nature, are in some measure regarded and revered as objects of worship, very much in the light of household deities, in fact. It is universally acknowledged that they have been ordained as a means of alleviating, preventing, or curing diseases. From this it is inferred that as medicines taken internally or applied externally are capable of such good effects in their natural state, they are also capable of altogether counter-acting a disease, or preventing its recurrence, if human, *i.e.* spiritual, intelligence and skill are employed in the manufacture and application of them.

In consequence of this belief there is a great variety of medicines in existence, and much rivalry between the various and numerous medicine men. This latter class have an exceedingly difficult part to play in endeavouring to establish their social and professional status in the community. For among the mass of the people they are more an object of dread than respect, because they are believed to be dispensers



of injurious poisons as well as of curative medicines. They invariably dress shabbily, with the evident purpose of appearing fantastical, also possibly to cultivate a resemblance to the spirits whose human manifestations they presumably are, or whose influence at least they are believed to represent.

The nonchalance and complacency of these remarkable men is only equalled by their egoism and self-importance, which is magnified a hundredfold because of the universal fear their presence excites among the people. So that it is not in the least surprising that they have assumed the position of dictators and arbitrators in general regarding the various means by which they can prevent, alleviate, and cure diseases.

According to popular estimation, medicines are divided into two classes: (1) preventive, and (2) curative.

### 1. *Preventive*

These with very few exceptions are considered throughout the length and breadth of Southern Nigeria as the most generally useful and the most efficacious, and they are in consequence used by all classes. They are usually prepared from a variety of natural objects, according to the wishes of the operator, and deposited in a large calabash, or earthen pot, and placed at the entrance of the house. The decoction, made in liquid form, is generally sprinkled by the individual over his body previous to attending any public function or entertainment; in other words, when leaving the precincts of his own domain to enter those belonging to some one else outside his own household. Kept for years in the same place, the decoction renewed, but the vessel never cleaned out, in a climate where putrefaction is the work of a few rapid hours, its condition can be better imagined than described. Yet in the eyes of these devotees the filthy mass is a spiritualised element that has the power to withstand and keep off the onslaught of any or all demons of disease.

Other preparations again are composed of tendrils, palm leaves, fruit, leaves, and roots of various descriptions. These are mashed into a pulp or paste, out of which is constructed

the rude figure of a man standing in a defensive attitude, with sword in one hand and a bow and arrow or spear and shield in the other, and this is placed either in the middle or in one of the corners of the house.

Various other concoctions of this kind are made, hardened, and worn in the shape of charms by all classes of people, parts of which are eaten, or, as the natives express it, buried in their bodies. One of these, called *Ulugbe*, is the lucky medicine, which is said to make the person wearing it fortunate in every respect, and in everything that he does or undertakes.

*Orruna*, on the other hand, is quite another form of charm, which has the power to blind the enemies of those who possess it, or the people who go to a town with hostile intent, while to friends or the well-disposed it is quite inoperative.

In the event of an abnormal increase in the mortality, or of an epidemic of disease breaking out in a town, the inhabitants combine as one man and prepare a general medicine for the purpose of either staying or driving away the disease. The services of every able-bodied female is enlisted for the occasion, and all are expected to contribute towards its preparation. This, medicine, however, is not placed inside the houses, but always on the public paths, especially on all approaches leading into the town. At the same time public sacrifices are offered to the medicine spirit at every new or full moon.

Here, again, it is plain to see in this act of sacrifice not merely the religious but the spiritual nature of the preventative. For believing, as these natives do, that the disease is the malicious act of certain malignant spirits, and recognising their own human helplessness in the matter, they immediately invoke the aid of ancestral or other spirits, who are favourably disposed towards them, to counteract and to defeat the active demonstrations of their relentless enemies.

When, however, all the efforts of the doctors and their medicine spirits fail to suppress a disease, the town is completely abandoned and a new site is selected at no great distance from the old. Many instances of this desertion have

come under my notice in the centre of the Ibo country and elsewhere. From this leaving the field in the possession of the disease spirits, it is very evident that the ancestral deities, as well as the medicine spirits, have failed to obtain the desired supremacy.

In no case, however, does it argue more than a temporary loss of confidence in the efficacy of either one or the other. For many eventualities have to be taken into consideration. In the first place, the fact that so many of their numbers have been struck down by the disease spirits shows that they, one and all, have been offenders in some former scene, upon whom retaliation has in consequence fallen. Secondly, this being the case, the matter is outside the jurisdiction of the ancestral deities, and the offenders have likewise incurred the ancestral wrath, which explains their non-intercession in the case. Thirdly, they recognise that the disease spirits have been in former possession of, and have a prior claim to, the ground upon which their town has been built, a fact that at once and in itself accounts for their aggressiveness.

So in spite of the labour, trouble, and expense that a move entails, no time is lost in deserting a town. And should more than one move be necessary, as sometimes happens, the construction still put upon the matter is not altogether attributed to the aggressiveness of the spirits, but also to the settlement of old scores—an account, in fact, that has long been outstanding.

Another recognised method of prevention is to smear the medicine all over the body, as a rule around the waist. Such preparations may be classed with others that are prepared for the following purposes: (1) to prevent rain from falling or to cause it to fall; (2) to prevent fire from burning or destroying the person or the house; (3) to prevent a dying man from losing his speech in the event of sudden and unlooked-for death; (4) to prevent the spells of witchcraft; (5) to prevent women from becoming barren, also to protect those who are pregnant; (6) to protect the person from evil spirits or spirits of the dead, particularly in the case of an individual who is said to have taken the natural oath of the world. This curious and extraordinary vow is ascribed only to those persons

who are subject to sudden and serious fits of raving and delirium, during which it is popularly believed that they appeal in terror to the spirits of former relations or companions who have died from this malady, not to torment or to claim them. Many varieties of these medicines are prepared and deposited in great secrecy, and there is no common method of using or applying them, as it is in secrecy that much of their virtue and efficacy appears to lie.

It is in those medicines which are mentioned in paragraphs (3) and (4) that we are confronted, however, with the deeper subtleties of this obvious spiritualism.

Taking the former in its deepest significance, it is at once plainly manifest that the importance, prior to the event of a sudden death, of preventing a dying man from losing his speech (*i.e.* reason), lies in the belief that the loss in question is spiritual and eternal. For, as death is but the separation of the spirit-soul from the human embodiment on the dissolution of the latter, any injury or deprivation that is effected before the separation naturally affects the spirit, and so becomes a permanent loss.

To make my meaning still clearer, it will be as well, however, to explain that speech is considered to be an entirely spiritual faculty, which in native opinion is derived through the animating principle received direct from the Creator, an exactly similar process presumably to that of reproduction. The evidence in support of this conception is to be seen in certain practical demonstrations of their belief: (1) that it is the spirits in possessed persons who speak, and not the persons themselves; (2) that the spirits of the departed talk to one another in spirit land, and in dreams to the souls of those in human form.

## 2. *Curative Medicines*

These usually consist of extracts from animals (the gall of poisonous snakes and leopards more particularly), vegetable, and mineral matters. There are a great many diseases among the people which are not properly treated, and it is really astonishing—according to my informants—to see the enormous



quantities of boiled decoctions which are swallowed by patients, in conformity to the doctor's instructions.

There are various methods by which medicines are prepared for use, the method being entirely regulated by the nature of the disease and the treatment required to meet the demands of the case. As a rule, however, it is usual to boil them with a large proportion of water and administer them to the patient in the form of infusions, except in the case of stomach-ache, when cold water infusions are used. Others again are made and employed as liniments, and applied with the object of alleviating pain in different parts of the body. Women who are pregnant have special medicines prepared for them, which, as a rule, are parched over the fire.

No medicine of any kind or form is ever made without some superstitious provision or injunction being placed upon it, prohibitive of certain conditions—restrictions that necessarily curtail and counteract the interference of anxious relatives, and which leave open the doctor's line of retreat in the event of failure. For any negligence in the due observance of these injunctions immediately nullifies a medicine and renders it altogether ineffectual. Hence it is that all medicines more or less, but particularly those which are notorious as protecting or preserving influences, are worshipped with due observance of rites and ceremonies as household gods.

Especially characteristic in this respect are war medicines, *i.e.* medicines which form part of a warrior's equipment, to protect him from the effects of arrows, bullets, swords, or any form of weapon. For not only do these all-potent charms make him invisible or invulnerable in case of attack, but if, taken unawares, he is killed in a fight, they have the capacity of resuscitating him and rendering him practically immortal. They are used in various ways: they are worn or carried on the person in the form of charms, amulets, or potions among many of the tribes, including Haussa and Yoruba; they are also eaten, or smeared all over the body, and some of the tribes, the Abam, for example, apply them in both ways, making the warriors quite impervious to bullets and all weapons.

Hunters also provide themselves with similar medicines, which enable them to escape the attacks of wild and ravenous



beasts by deadening their sensibilities, or by converting themselves for the time being, or until the threatened danger is over, into a tree or plant.

Thieves too are supposed to provide themselves with an exceedingly powerful medicine, which is called Inyima. This is so soporific in its effects, and so extremely rapid and effective in its operation, that no person can refrain from sleeping on the mere approach of a thief who is armed with it. It is popularly supposed that no single element in the human, animal, and vegetable kingdoms is excepted in its preparation. Other medicines again are supposed to have an absolutely magnetic influence over the hearts of individuals, making them kindly disposed towards those who desire their friendship. These, in all qualities, are practically equivalent to another form which is used in trading, and which is said to make a trader prosperous in all his trade undertakings and affairs.

Among the coast middlemen these spirits of trade medicines, as we shall see in the next section, are exalted to the position of local deities; and in Brass, for instance, Amgbagbayai — an Owu or water spirit — is popularly believed to trade in the factories in oil and other produce, for the good or otherwise of the person whom he wishes either to benefit or to harm.

Very similar to this Brass god, but displaying greater avarice and less general forbearance, is Agaru, an Ibo spirit, who confers on those individuals who get into touch with him, the power by which they can conveniently acquire the property of others during their lifetime.

Social and medical etiquette, as we regard it, is neither understood nor practised. Indeed, where anxiety prevails regarding the condition of a patient, scant ceremony is used towards the doctor who, if he fails to give relief to or to cure his charge within a few days, is supplemented or ousted by another, and the new arrival, if not successful, has in his turn to make room for a third or even a fourth. So that it is not at all an uncommon occurrence to see on occasions as many as three or four kinds of medicine being applied by different doctors at the same time to the same patient.

For, according to popular estimation, in choosing between

two opinions, there is in a multitude of counsellors more spiritual strength to resist the attack of the disease demon than there is weakness in the difference of treatment accorded by a plethora of doctors. True, the doctors may—as we say—differ, but the spirits of the medicines as a combination are three or four to one, and that in itself is argument, if not odds enough, in their favour.

Most of these medicine men, the most intelligent of my informants have told me, are, as far as the healing art is concerned, impostors, many of them professing to a knowledge of medicines, while they are all the time profoundly ignorant of the nature of the diseases that they endeavour to remedy. Naturally enough, they do not expose their ignorance, but continue to make experiments on the sick person in the hope of making a cure. If, however, they notice symptoms that betoken a serious change for the worse in the condition of their patient, they make themselves scarce at once, without even demanding their fees, in case they should be compulsorily detained pending the result. Hence it is an Ibo saying that the Dibia never foretell the death of a sick person.

The following is a good illustration of one of the methods employed by the doctor and diviner in the case of a man who was seriously ill, and whose illness had baffled all the local medicine men. The doctor in attendance (quite a celebrity, in his way, as a diviner, from the far interior—anything over two days' journey or fifty miles being reckoned far) first, of all placed a certain medicine in the patient's hand, in the belief that it would cure him by producing nausea, and causing him to vomit. As it did not produce the desired result, he promptly abandoned the rôle of doctor and assumed that of diviner, informing those present that he would very soon determine whether recovery were possible or not.

Proceeding outside into the open compound attached to the house, he placed a basin of water on the ground, compelling all the onlookers to retire to some distance, while he sat himself down close by and watched what appeared to be the lights and shadows that were thrown on its surface by the movements of the sun's rays, or, as he expressed it, the shadow—*i.e.* soul—of the sick man.

Like the exorcist of Ndoni, he sat tailor fashion, his face a mask daubed all over with chalk marks, that had been laid on with much care to conceal expression, his eyes fixed on the basin, and his thoughts also concentrated on the soul shadow. This insisted, so he said, in fitting all round the basin, as if in a state of utter indecision, but it would not enter, as it ought to have done.

Then, after some time, when the sun had retired and left the basin all in shadow, it was evident that the sick man's chance, in the opinion of the diviner, was altogether hopeless. His shadow had gone away—therefore it was certain beyond all doubt that his body would die also.

A few words regarding the thought readers and masters of divination will not here be out of place. For they are held in great repute, as possessing the spiritual power of seeing underneath the surface of Nature with such effect that they can reveal hidden secrets and unearth mysteries that lie beyond the limit of human comprehension. In consequence of this belief the people place unlimited confidence in them and their art, which, in their estimation, is capable not only of unearthing the cause of every evil, but of presenting the remedy that will defeat its purpose and remove it altogether. These men, more than the priests and doctors, are the real philosophers, carrying within their crafty brain all that is deepest, yet, as is natural, all that is shallowest in the nature and character of their own humanity. But surrounded by a ring fence of reticence, they are quite inaccessible in the direction of philosophy, though not as regards the practice of it when this brings them in an appreciable revenue. For in no sense of the word are they philanthropists, but they are quick and ready opportunists. Opportunism is, in fact, cultivated by priests and doctors as well as diviners, and all three classes make use of every available opportunity to get a footing into the domestic concerns of any and every household.

There are certain points which are worthy of notice, as well as of registration. These are as follows:—(1) The fact that medicine spirits are venerated and treated in the same light as household deities. (2) That in classifying them the natives themselves exclude poisons as being spirit objects that are one

with the canker of witchcraft, consequently altogether outside the domain of the ordinary human and spiritual life. Yet poison has to be reckoned with and tolerated, along with doctors and diviners, as an inevitable curse—hence a specific medicine is necessary to keep off its accursed spells. (3) The fact that a distinctive difference is recognised between evil spirits and the spirits of the departed, *i.e.* those who are awaiting the final burial sacrament prior to proceeding to spirit land. (4) That when all contrivances—spiritual or otherwise—fail them, a change of place and scene is considered not only advisable but judicious, presumably with the idea of throwing the demons off the scent, on the assumption that they adhere to certain localities. (5) That while the preventive medicines are practically passive in their operation, there is more power and efficacy, consequent on a greater activity, in those which protect and preserve. (6) That to ensure efficacy secrecy is indispensable as regards their manipulation. (7) That although doctors and diviners are dreaded because they are believed to be dispensers of poisons, and therefore connected with witchcraft, they are always employed and trusted, merely because they are as inevitable a factor in Delta society as spiritualism itself, for they are the mediums and mediators who bring the people and the spirits into touch with one another when the ancestral medicine has run down or got out of order. (8) Again, a point which is very significant is, that instead of these mediums appealing direct to the spirit element when consulted by these people, they prefer to do so through these medicines. And herein they show their subtlety. For medicine is but another and more convenient form of spirit medium, which conceals their art so effectively behind a veil of secrecy that it not only makes assurance doubly sure but enhances their reputation, while it also reduces the chances of detection to a minimum. (9) Finally, the fact that animals also possess spiritual powers, *i.e.* medicines or charms, which are spiritual in their scope and operations. This has already been referred to and an explanation of its conception offered in Chapter III. Section IV., so that it is unnecessary to make any further comment on the subject.





## SECTION VI

### EMBLEMISM, OR THE EMBODIMENT OF THE SPIRIT

AS SEEN IN THE UTILISATION OF VARIOUS MATTER

*A.* TREES ; *B.* STONES ; *C.* ANIMALS ; *D.* SNAKES ;  
*E.* NATURAL ELEMENTS AND PHENOMENA



## CHAPTER I

### A GENERAL EXPLANATION OF EMBLEMISM

DEALING, as I have all along done, with this subject of Delta religion from the native standpoint, it is justifiable on my part, after a personal experience of ten years, to arrive at certain definite conclusions regarding the groups into which it is divided, the grounds for which consist of ancient and still existing practices.

We have already seen in Section II. that while in a collective sense naturism stands for their religion as a whole, spiritualism and emblemism divide it into two phases,—the former, as the internal or animating principle, giving it life and soul, the latter, as the external aspect, expressing itself in certain outward forms or emblems, which are simply material and substantial images embodying the invisible spirits, who to natural man, however, are none the less real and existing entities. For the principle of embodiment, as we have seen, is the line of demarcation between the normal human spirit and the abnormal human demon,—in other words, between the unit of the divided energies of good and evil and the indivisible unit of evil only.

A simple and natural statement such as this ought to be immediately palpable to any intelligent inquirer who has gone to work in the true direction ; but notwithstanding the fact that so many Europeans have essayed to define this natural cult, which is practically common to all barbarians, few, if any, of the inquirers, it seems to me, have got to the root, therefore to the truth of the matter, for the very simple reason, as I have elsewhere shown, that they have not gone to work in the right

way ; they have therefore—although acting in all conscientiousness—arrived at a wrong estimate of natural religion, through a misconception of the real nature of the people, formed principally on preconceived opinions and to some extent on erroneous data. Thus it is that from the accepted European point of view, emblemism, as typified by fetichism and idolatry, and in an imperfect sense by totemism, is by no means properly or thoroughly understood. For every so-called worship of animals, trees, stones, or other natural and artificial objects, whatever they might be, is included under this one comprehensive term, and the spirits, practically in every case ancestral, and not the objects, form the real and the ultimate aim or goal of the various worshippers.

Animals and material objects of every description are not so much selected as utilised for the convenience of familiar or family spirits, who possess or attach themselves to the animal or object, be it elephant, or snail, a feather, a skull, a stone, a stick, a broken potsherd or piece of jagged glass, or a rusty nail. But as I am dealing with the animal, and other phases of symbolism, under specific headings, we will confine ourselves in this chapter to the still more material aspect of the question.

These household spirits, it must be remembered, who have in every instance originally lived in the flesh, have in their time been naturists, pure and simple, and in no sense artists. Consequently they have had no delicacy of mental perception, no nicety of thought—have had nothing at all, in fact, of the æsthetic, the artistic, or the fastidious about them, otherwise it is presumed they would not have attached themselves to such undignified, hideous, and insignificant looking objects.

Before proceeding any farther, however, it will be advisable for me at the outset to explain that in selecting the word emblemism, in preference to symbolism, as representing the outer and material expression of the spiritual inwardness or tenancy, I was guided in my choice by the relative analogy and suitability of the former to the actual meaning which was intended to be conveyed. For taking both words literally, while symbolism implies a throwing, or bringing together, at the most,—an apt enough phrase in a general or ordinary sense,—emblemism, expressing, as it does, that

which is put in, is in every particular the more applicable as it is the most exact. Because the emblem is the house, and the spirit is the tenant *in perpetuo*—in a word, the emblem is the god or spirit-house. For it is not in the object, the dead and senseless emblem, that the efficacy lies, but in the spirit, in the God-like and animating principle which gives life, but at the same time is endowed with the capacity of taking it. The belief in spiritualism is not only still present, unimpaired and unaltered, but it is present in all the greater force, concentrated in these hideous externals.

The object, in fact, is merely a reminder. It may be an introduction, possibly an innovation, still for all that it is only a something material added to stimulate the jaded memory, and to symbolise the existence of the unseen world around. Unseen, yet known because felt, not merely through the sensations, but tangibly and in a decided material sense, as, for instance, in physical infirmities and calamities, which are the work of inimical spirits.

Not that these illiterate people, with their tenacious memories, require much stimulus in this direction, but they are unable to concentrate their mental faculties without a substantial reminder, and also it is essential that the mediator advocate—the position invariably occupied by the spiritual tenant of the emblem—should be near at hand, and available in some tangible shape or form, which can contain him while concealing him from outside interference. For intensely spiritualistic as concentrated reflection and the inherited acquisition of successive æons of mental effort has made them, these people are just as intensely materialistic, and it is this fact which explains why in popular estimation a material body of some shape or form is considered essential for all ancestral spirits whose services are utilised or whose memories are revered. For this in reality in their eyes constitutes the great and radical difference between those spirits from whom human (*i.e.* dual) treatment may be expected, and the malignant demons who wander about formless, always ready to perpetrate evil, and evil only. Nor must it be forgotten that with a great proportion of these symbolised spirits rest and adoration have been the objects of retirement into many of these emblems,



and that a still greater proportion have been relegated to animal embodiment, in accordance with their time-honoured and sacred system of ancestral supervision.

Thus it was that in the very early stages of naturism, before human intelligence became capable of the imitative art, fetichism, or the natural emblem, evolved earlier than idolatry, or artificial symbolism, which, as the first step in art, was an indirect advance in religious ceremonial.

It is in the act and purpose of this materialisation, in other words, of this emblemism of spirits, which we speak of as fetichism and idolatry, that much misconstruction has been placed, principally by missionaries and travellers, who, although their own Christian religion has been evolved from the same identical germ, and on somewhat similar lines, have been the greatest offenders in this respect.

But deteriorate as they are, this emblemism, even to the natives of the present day, is merely an external formula of an inner cult of worship. Of the truth of this there is no question to any one who has lived amongst and followed them, as I have done, in all their social and religious customs, with a sympathy that was sincere, an interest which was earnestly intelligent, and an observation that was keen and close.

Looking into this question, as I have done, in all sincerity, through their deepest feelings, as expressed in all their religious practices and in their purest philosophies, there can be no doubt that emblemism in the earlier days, and emblemism as it now stands, were two very different matters. Not because it has in any way departed from the original conception with regard to its principles and formulas, but because there was an importance attaching to it in the former state which has to a great extent, if not entirely, lost its significance in these later days. For it seems to me that emblemism in the early days represented a distinct condition of social advancement, development, and expansion, expressing in various natural forms and embodiments a ritual of adoration towards the unseen and unknown Creator, through the seen and known fathers and spirit fathers, that hitherto had been felt but unexpressed.

More than this, moving in co-operation, as the physical and mental have always done, an expansion of intelligence

implied a corresponding expansion of the social units, who, synchronous with their increase, broke off and away from the parent stocks. An experience that made the existence of the emblem a still greater necessity, and essential, in fact, to their very existence. Because, although separation from the patriarchal stem did not immediately affect the human propagation of the branch detached, separation from the spiritual fathers most certainly did, affecting its future vitality, or, to be more correct, spirituality, which latter was altogether dependent on a continuance of the spirit-supply. For, as we have seen, according to their doctrine of the continuity of the spirit-soul, and its numerous soul existences, in varied material bodies, the spiritual was no less needful for the human than, to a more confined extent, the latter was for the former.

It is quite evident then that symbols became all the more necessary on expansion and separation to enable the detaching portions to take away with them those ancestral spirits who, as they believed, were absolutely essential to their very existence and perpetuation as a social unit. What is more, this placing themselves under the protection of their fathers—which in reality was of course the other way about—was in those days the most convenient, as it was the safest and surest, method of perpetuating the ancestral faith, in other words, the spirits of their fathers, and in this way of course of themselves.

These expansions and detachments are to be seen all over the Delta, first of all in the mere transfer of emblems from one locality to another; secondly, in the exchange of emblems by the same community; and, thirdly, in the variation in different localities of names and emblems representing the same god.

To give two or three examples, not so much in evidence of this assertion as merely by way of illustration, we will take Onitsha, on the Niger, as the first instance. Here is still to be found in the emblem or tree selected, and indeed planted, by himself, the spirit of the king Tsima, under whose charge the people migrated or were driven, fourteen generations ago, from the vicinity of Benin city.

Thus in Brass, too, the tradition is that the tribal god Ogidiga, symbolised by a python, as he also was in Benin city, was originally brought from that place by Alepe, a chief, when

the exodus of himself and army took place some twelve generations since. At the time in question there were in existence in Benin, so it appears, a male and a female deity. An imitation of the latter was made by Alepe, and by means of a special ceremony it was believed that the spirit of the original was conjured into the imitation.

In the same way the Akwete people still cling to Nkwu Abasi, the god from the distant sea, in the form of a stone kept in a small stream.

The Ibani, who came from the Ibo interior and settled in Bonny over 300 years ago, had as their original ancestral emblem a monkey, which afterwards was altered to the iguana, an alteration that merely implied the transfer of the ancestral spirits to a new and more suitable emblem. The transfer was also made to apply to their deities who, through a change in conditions, in other words, through the force of circumstances, were obliged to adapt themselves to the water and to trade, not in lieu of farming and hunting, but merely in addition to their other functions.

This, by no means an uncommon instance, as also evidenced, *e.g.* by the New Calabar people, who were originally Efik, or the Adoni, who came from the Ibibio country, brings us to quite another and no less significant feature of emblemism, for it shows that the whole significance of natural religion is based and built up on the adoration of the ancestral spirits, and that the emblems encasing them are nothing more or less than a convenient form of external embodiment, which can be altered or transferred according to circumstances. This transfer is made to meet local requirements, and to suit contingencies that have arisen out of a new mode of life, such as a change from the interior to the sea, or *vice versa*, would necessitate, bringing with it incorporation, through inter-marriage and the slave system, with other tribes and other ancestral gods. Apart, however, from this aspect of the question, there is another side to it which is of quite as much importance. For practically in every community one finds the same gods, possessing in each separate locality not only a different name, but invariably a different emblem. If this fact in itself does not establish beyond a doubt that emblemism is, as I have described it, the

mere outer shell or covering of the real and inner spiritualism that would otherwise be naked, as it were, and condemned, as are the outcast demons, to a life of restlessness and exposure, then it is only possible to fall back upon the word of the people themselves, whose sincerity in this respect I have no reason whatever to doubt.

These objects, material and senseless although they be, are looked on by these Delta natives as vehicles of spiritual influence, as something sacred, as relics or mementoes to be venerated, because of their actual association with some familiar and powerful spirit, and not as objects which in themselves have, or carry with them, any so-called supernatural powers. It is not the object itself, but what is in the object, that is the power for good or for evil. Hence it is, that although they venerate the object itself, they do so only because of the spirit which resides in or is associated with it. The object, accordingly, becomes nothing more or less than a sacred receptacle, and its holiness is merely a question of association. Association, in fact, combined with practice, as we have seen, from beginning to end of this natural religion of a natural people, is the principal and the connecting element. The thing itself is helpless and powerless, it can do no harm, just as it can do no good. The spirit it is (invariably ancestral even when deified) that does the mischief, and wreaks the vengeance in the event of neglect and impiety, or which confers the benefits and the blessings when the ancestral rites are performed with due piety by the household. The object is inspired, therefore, because of the possessing spirit which sanctifies it, and thus reverence and homage are paid to it, and sacrifices, generally propitiatory, are laid before it.

Collective or general worship, with ritual and formulas, is not practised, except in the daily and weekly ancestral services and regular annual festivals, but individual prayer is offered in the form of a petition, always accompanied by an offering or sacrifice of fruit or meat, according to the nature of the boon requested and the means of the worshipper; and, as a general rule, the adoration is one of propitiation, combined with a request.

But although this conciliatory worship is paid, to all out-



ward appearance, to the external object, it is in reality made to the indwelling spirit, who by its shadow presence or attachment to so insignificant a vehicle accentuates its own greatness.

In this practical way the insignificance of the object is of no consequence. Indeed, the greater its insignificance the greater the reflected glory or power of the elastic spirit. Comparison not only calls attention to but magnifies, so to speak, the external defect of the object through the reflected greatness of the sanctifier. For it is absolutely certain that to these natives the insignificance or grotesqueness of the object does not, even in the most trifling sense, detract from the significance and power of the spirit. In other words, embodiment, although essential to the character and sacredness of the spirit, is entirely a secondary element in comparison with the spirit. Because, while the former is liable to dissolution or death, the latter is practically eternal under normal conditions, to say nothing of its infinitely greater scope and power.

Worship, in the accepted European sense of the word, does not so much prevail as homage and adoration. It is in the act, in the offering up of substantial sacrifice, that the efficacy of propitiation lies. In their opinion prayer is of little avail—and what is said must be short and to the point—action the only remedy.

Religion, even in a symbolical sense, is not a public or national affair, but entirely a personal and family, or at the most, communal, matter. It is a question of individual or united self-interests, with the priest or doctor as go-between in all abnormal cases, in which the petitioners are not on good terms with the spiritual medium. For without securing the intervention of the former it is frequently not possible for the individual or the family to appease the offended or aggressive spirit.

The doctor and the priest are dispensed with in all influential or powerful families, for in these the ancestral spirits possess a power that can make itself felt to some purpose with regard to outside politics and the general direction of affairs. But even the most powerful chiefs make it a point, more or



less varying with their individualities, to keep in with both, utilising them as they do on all occasions that are suitable to their own purposes, especially in personal matters.

Needless to say, that households such as these are powerful in a strictly temporal and worldly sense, having at their disposal numerical strength, wealth in kind, and all that in the Delta world constitutes a power that can strike a blow, or deal out an injury to its numerous enemies. For inseparable as is the human from the spiritual, the temporal lends all its weight to the latter, and the spiritual in its turn represents and vitalises the temporal.

In cases such as these religion is more than ever merged in the personality of the ancestral, and the head of the house takes the place of the doctor or priest, especially in such cases where he is a man of striking individuality, when the household manes may be directly appealed to without intervention of any one.

## CHAPTER II

A FURTHER AND SPECIFIC EXPOSITION, ESPECIALLY WITH  
REGARD TO THE TERMS FETICHISM, IDOLATRY, AND  
TOTEMISM

ALTHOUGH I have already said enough in the last chapter to make it evident that fetichism and idolatry are not terms which thoroughly and completely express either the native idea or principle upon which animals and objects are set up as convenient receptacles for the worship of certain natural or ancestral spirits, I have reserved this chapter for these antiquated and imperfect terms, as they appear to me to be, with the object of making the true meaning of the whole cult of emblemism still more evident.

The spirits that are found in these objects are of various natural kinds, principally and primarily ancestral, of a nature similar to the Roman lares and penates, or the Hindu pitris or family deities, gods and spirits of protection and preservation to households or communities, such as are seen, in fact, all over the world, irrespective of race or locality.

The method in use to induce them to occupy the objects in question is simple in the extreme, for it is not necessary, as a rule, to allure, entice, or conjure the departed spirits by means of any subtle process of flattery, adulation, or supplication, since they enter within voluntarily, and in many instances with a purpose that has been previously expressed during their lifetime.

The ancestral shades, in the natural order of things, during a certain ceremonial which is accompanied by the inevitable sacrifice, take possession of the symbol that has been previ-

ously selected by themselves (or in the event of a departed member having omitted to do so, by the head of the house), and require no special inducement of any kind to make them do so. This, in fact, is a custom that goes back, like all their customs, beyond the memory of tradition, having been handed down from father to son in regular succession. In specific cases, however, similar to the one mentioned in the last chapter, with reference to the removal by Alepe of the spirit of the Benin Ju-Ju to Nembe, a special ceremony, always sacrificial, is indispensable, not merely to conjure with, but in order to obtain the consent of the spirit. This is doubly necessary in an instance of this kind, because the transfer is not only one of emblems but of localities, and the spirits of the Delta, oblivious to the truism that variety is the spice of life, are quite as averse to a change of scene as are its dusky inhabitants. Whatever the object selected, it is an understood thing that the soul of the departed, after all earthly ceremonials have been enacted and the prescribed probation has been undergone, returns from spirit land, and without any special ceremonial takes up its residence in the selected symbol.

This applies more particularly to the house in which the head of the family has himself lived, and in which, when death comes, he is buried. Then it is, that after the burial sacrament has been finally concluded, the occupation becomes a spiritual continuation of the material life which has endured, as it were, for a season, and ended so abruptly. Hence it is, too, that when a member of a family or community was seized by another and outside household, the Delta law of a life for a life grew to be an absolute necessity.

It was not, as we wrongly interpret it, the mere loss of the body and of his services—the man's mere marketable value, in other words—that were felt by his family. It was the irreparable loss to them of the soul, with its ability to contribute its iota of spirituality towards the maintenance of the human circle, as well as to fight for and uphold their temporal interests, that primarily prompted this severe but equitable law. Hence, it was not merely a body for a body, but, as in human sacrifice, a soul for a soul. To rob the body

was bad enough, but to steal its vital essence was an offence that could only be wiped out by the seizure and death of the perpetrator of the outrage, or at least of one of his household, so as to secure a body and a soul in exchange for these so ruthlessly snatched away.

It was exactly on the same principle that the Bini offered up human sacrifice both before and during the march of the punitive expedition to Benin City, not merely to propitiate the gods, but materially to aid them in a spiritual sense.

However much the original significance of this law may have been recently materialised, the law itself holds good to this day where civilisation has not yet stepped in, and to those who can get to the root of the matter the underlying principle still remains.

Relics of the departed, if not always specialised as holding the spirit, are invariably looked upon with respect and veneration, because of their connection and associations, and in the case of a chief whose house has been left intact, his effects occupy the exact places which they did during his lifetime. In those cases, however, where a new house is built over the remains, as, for example, among the Efik, Ibibio, and New Calabar people, certain things are removed to the new tenement, and placed along with the Duen-fubara in the ancestral chapel, and a special and elaborate ceremony is indulged in (as we saw in Section IV.), simply because of the spiritual aversion to change of scene and premises. For the whole essence of this so-called cult of fetichism revolves round this central idea, the belief that spirit life is but a continuity of the present existence in another phase. Conditions do not change. Fresh conditions are not imposed. Merely a transfer has been effected from this sphere to the other—the whereabouts of which is, however, more or less of a mystery, but presumably in the air.

Although inspired, because of the spiritual presence, objects, be they relics or not, have neither life nor movement. They are, in fact, lifeless in spite of the spirit contained, and in no sense are they able to hold any communication with the outside world. The lowliest person has the right and privilege

to consult an oracle, the efficacy of which depends entirely on the value of the oblation; but it is the animated oracle they consult, and not the senseless object, although in holding converse they apparently do so with the emblem. This, however, is in every sense comprehensible, for senseless though the object may be to all external appearances, for them it contains a spirit tenant who has the power of conferring undiminished prosperity or of dealing out injury, even death, to them.

In this way not only is the emblem a reminder of this spiritual existence and power, but it is an object that is in every sense a familiar, and if judiciously manipulated, a friend, with the ability to strike the worst enemies of all, namely, those who, like the snakes of their jungles, lie concealed awaiting the opportunity to attack.

And here the humanity of this spiritualism, although hidden from the believers by the dense profundity and oblivion of time and ignorance, is glaringly apparent, for spirits, and even divinities, are pliant and plastic enough to be manipulated by that inferior and insignificant being called man.

The actual process of conjuring or rather enticing spirits into certain specific objects is not, as I have previously mentioned, practised to any extent, because the necessity for it does not in reality exist; but when the occasion arises the ubiquitous doctor, who is equally qualified either to drive in or cast out, is always ready to apply his arts and wiles. On no account, however, does he interfere with the ancestral spirits, because it is only in the case of continuous calamity that a diviner possessing special powers and a more than local reputation is called in. In cases also where something out of the common has occurred, or when misfortune or calamity may be anticipated, when, for instance, a spirit has been seized or led astray by subtle machination, or, owing to negligence on the part of a household towards the ancestral one, his anger and vengeance may be expected, a special appeal is made to the stronger oracle. In this way it was that the Aro Chuku—the god of the Aro, or rather the god of the universe, whose chosen people or children the Aro were—was recognised and resorted to as a court of appeal by all the tribes



of the Lower Niger and Cross river, which acknowledged its spiritual efficacy.

If *feitigo* be taken as the word from which fetichism is derived, and a charm as its literal meaning — a fact there seems to be no doubt about—all that can be said regarding the matter is that the interpretation placed upon the word by the Portuguese navigators was much too literal; and there can be no doubt that it is this universal literality in the interpretation of savage customs which accounts for the prevailing misconception that has been formed with regard to barbaric religions.

This, in connection with the word that we are discussing, can easily be explained by the fact that, taking into consideration the veneration which all devout Catholics have for relics and charms, they looked upon the various objects revered by the natives from exactly the same standpoint, and in doing so they looked no farther. To them the people who adored such monstrous objects, in which there was no artistic skill, were monsters, cannibals, savages, and heathens, whose gods were made of wood and stone, therefore senseless, because the name of Christ and the sign of the cross were unknown.

It is true that the latter were wanting, and that from the Portuguese aspect these wretched beings were in utter darkness in consequence, but as regards the true significance of the charmed objects, these hardy navigators were certainly quite at sea. For although many portable things, such as claws, teeth, bones, feathers, pebbles, etc., are carried about and used as charms to keep off evil, in the same sense that amulets are used by various European and Mohammedan nations, other material objects, not meant to be moved about, are utilised for the specific purpose of protecting farms, paths, avenues of approach, entrances to towns or houses, water, rivers, etc., one and all of these being only useful because inspired.

The fact of the matter is that, so far as these Delta natives are concerned, the terms *fetich* and *idol* would be, if they were in use, synonymous, but as the one word is employed to explain both, the fact speaks for itself.

Looking at the question even from an European standpoint, between fetichism and idolatry there is little, if any,

serious difference; and if there is, it is a difference not in kind but of degree—a step upward, perhaps, in the ladder of evolution, certainly a step farther removed from material nature, although the earliest and the crudest attempt in primitive art.

It is not in reality easy to discriminate between the two as they appear to the native mind, but inasmuch as fetichism was an earlier development, when man's intelligence was in a lower state, it is a lower form, for it was but the materialisation of certain ancestral spirits and spirits of Nature, who, in order that they might be centralised or within his reach, were placed in natural objects, not only as the most convenient receptacles, but because he had not yet arrived at the higher development of rude carving or moulding. Idolatry, then, was nothing more or less than a higher form of development of exactly the same belief, in the sense that it was the utilisation of artificial or humanly constructed in place of material or natural objects as emblems, and possibly rude likenesses of certain spirits now raised to or accepted as deities.

For so-called fetichism, as it is practised by the Delta tribes, is the homage, through material objects, of spirits of a personal or domestic nature, while idolatry is a similar homage through material objects that have, however, been fashioned by human hands, paid to deities belonging as a rule more to the community than to the individual or household, but common to both. The difference, then, lies, as we can see, in two very minor details of technique, for the principle of the two supposed cults is practically one and the same thing, a propitiatory adoration of ancestral, also active and aggressive nature spirits, through natural objects in one case, and artificial in the other, but in either case the objects are merely and purely symbolical. Thus it is that any insignificant object answers the purpose, because it is the god or spirit who is revered, and not the material emblem.

Nor does the fact of one set of objects being artificial and the other natural convey any real difference to the native mind, as might from an European standpoint be inferred. Indeed the spirit contained in an insignificant charm or natural object may be, and is, far more powerful and dreaded

than he who resides in state in an idol, be it ever so large or ever so gorgeously painted. The great difference in bulk between their various emblems is explained by the fact that in native estimation the spirit is an elastic and mobile element, like wind, which, as soul, can compress itself into the tiniest space. In this way it is that it can enter into the body of the smallest infant, and yet be capable of possessing the frame of the biggest man. More than this, it is open to a number of spirits, as we have seen in Section IV. Chapter III., to enter into the same object or emblem, which shows at least that the spirit element is adaptable to every kind of circumstance or condition.

Curiously enough, however, in spite of their own personal love of finery and riches, so intensely practical and unartistic are these natives in the conduct of their religious ceremonials that, as regards their gods at all events, they are exceedingly niggardly with respect to clothing or ornamentation, neither being employed beyond cloth in small quantities and coats made out of local dyes.

In the same way that the word *feitigo* does not convey fully and entirely a true expression of the cult that it is meant to define as well as represent, the term *Ju-Ju*, so largely used by all Europeans who have been to any portion of West Africa, as well as by educated natives, also implies an acceptance which is exceedingly vague and indefinite. It is, as a rule, employed when reference or allusion is made to idols, fetiches, or other sacred objects connected with local religion, and was presumably introduced into the Niger Delta from some other portion of the coast, and adopted by the natives as the white man's name for religion and all sacred objects belonging to it.

But unlike *feitigo*, the word *Ju-Ju*, as pointed out in Section II., is probably of native and not of European derivation. For although it is possible that, as an outcome of their early commercially adventurous intercourse with the coast natives, it might be of French extraction, it is a word that is quite as well understood by the interior as the coast natives, and applied in a broad and general sense to anything sacred, or in the form of an emblem, be it idol or fetich. Yet, as I have already

shown, the word Egugu is used in a more specific sense, as the spirit of a dead man, for even the very coast tribes, who, as being altogether more in touch with white men, use Ju-Ju when conversing with, or interpreting for, the former, have their own word which they always use among themselves. The Brass term Oru, which is common to all tribes of Ijo origin or extraction, the Efik Ebok, and the various Ibo and Ibibio terms, are all to be interpreted by the word medicine, *i.e.* a spiritual means for gaining ends that are superhuman—beyond or outside the scope of humanity, in other words. In the same manner that objects are in every sense material, Ju-Jus have none of the human powers which denote life attributed to them, and the customs which prevail among the Hindus of treating their idols in every respect as if they were human beings does not obtain, except that they are talked to as containing spirits of divine intelligence and comprehension.

These Ju-Jus are used for various purposes, *e.g.* (1) for the protection or preservation of a household or town from witchcraft or from any outside or inside evil or danger; (2) as a preventative against, or to obtain recovery from, sickness; (3) to give success in trade, farming, hunting, and fishing, as the case may be. Various objects are utilised for the purpose in those cases where idols are not employed. Human and animal skulls, besides teeth and bones of every variety, eggs, plantains, and chickens, often staked to the ground, are used at cross roads to ward off an anticipated evil, or to check or break the spell which has produced disease. But these latter articles, although spoken of as Ju-Jus to white men, are in reality only so in the sense that they are sacred, for in the case of all things vegetal or animal, the object is not a symbol, but an offering or sacrifice.

The adoration and homage paid to idols is also in every respect similar to that which is shown to natural objects, but while, as a rule, the former have a priesthood and Ju-Ju houses or temples, as a still more emphatic and monumental demonstration of their existence, the latter are confined to natural haunts and certain defined localities, which are more in evidence in the daily life and associations of the people, and which, outside ancestral limitations, and in special emergencies, come



more within the province of the inevitable witch doctors, but not of course necessarily so. To all intents and purposes the natives do not see, and certainly do not make or express, any difference between the cult of the natural and the artificial emblems. But it is evident enough that fetichism is the earlier and the more ancient form of emblemism, out of which idolatry or artificial emblemism has naturally evolved.

Among the Ibo the figures of ancestors rudely carved, that are placed at the houses or at the tombs in the burial-grounds, or which are carried on the person, are for the object of worship, and in some localities the skulls which have been preserved as trophies (*vide* Chapter II. Section IV.) are also utilised for the same purpose. This is notably the case among the Sobo, the Ibibio, the Kwa, and the Efik, the latter of whom adorn the skull with feathers and daub it over with dye—generally yellow—and mount it on a stick; to this they pay the greatest reverence, as all alike do to the emblem of the ancestral mediator.

In Brass a similar kind of stick—used, however, as a staff, or carried in the hand, surmounted by a carved image of the ancestor—is valued as a life preserver or protector of the lives of the household. Before eating and drinking it is usual to offer a little of both food and liquid to this household deity. Worship is rendered to these various emblems, as containing the spirits of their more immediate ancestors, by sacrifice, which is accompanied by prayer. This, which from a European standpoint is more in the form of a petition or request, is usually worded in the following few and simple words: “Preserve our lives, O spirit father who hast gone before, and make thy house fruitful, so that we thy children shall increase, multiply, and so grow rich and powerful.”

Before making this direct and practical petition, it is usual to place the fruit or flesh offerings on or sometimes at the foot of the figure, and on the conclusion of the ceremony to eat them. These figures or objects, in other cases, are merely emblematical mediums, personal links of association, that connect the human with the spiritual, or the visible with the invisible, which are used by these people as a means of communication with the ancestral deity, and, just as we talk



into a telephone, they converse with one of these figures or objects, firmly convinced that the indwelling spirit mediator will listen, receive, and then convey their messages to their ancestral destination.

This act of communication may be made by any member of a household desirous of cultivating his own individual welfare, and not necessarily by the family or other priest, whose services in this direction are never requisitioned except on certain very special and public occasions of festival or sacrifice, which concern the welfare of the community at large. Virtually, indeed, every household has its own priest in the person of the eldest son.

This, as it were, first qualification of the ancestral faith, "Do unto your ancestors as you would they should do unto you," is vigorously applied, because the faith which prompts it is strenuously sincere, and the principle from which it has germinated is that of like equivalents. Figures, images, or objects do not consume the food which is set before them, but the popular idea is, that when this consists of vegetables or animal substance, the soul of the food goes straight to the land of spirits, to those spirits who are being appealed to. Figures and other objects neither speak nor walk about, but as they are animated they serve as mediators and communicators between the people and their ancestors. But although they are voiceless and immobile, all objects that are possessed by spirits are capable of vibration and of giving utterance to sounds of various kinds. Consequently more respect and greater fear is entertained of these, who are treated as gods, and who, in giving expression to their various emotions, cause the objects which encase them to shake and tremble.

In exactly the same manner idols are also regarded as mere representations of spiritual beings, automatons that act as convenient figureheads and channels of communication to their ancestors, without which these autocratic spirits would neither listen to nor regard their communications.

It is usual, for example, when a member of some household is sick—or in other special cases, of course—to consult the Dibia or doctor. This wily individual, after a certain ceremony, by means of which he gets into touch with the

spirit world, and especially that portion of it which is apportioned off to the house in question, is able to communicate the desires of the idol medium. These are invariably and practically to the effect that, because of duty neglected or offence committed against the tutelary deities, they are grievously displeased, possibly with the individual, or it may be with the family, which displeasure has taken practical form in the illness of one particular individual—the offending member, or probably the unfortunate affinity of one of the ancestral spirits who has been likewise afflicted. On the advice of the all-wise doctor, the usual propitiatory sacrifices are offered to the symbolised mediator spirit, who, carrying the soul of the offering to the aggrieved or afflicted deities, pleads for the afflicted household.

The sequel is easily told. Should the afflicted member recover, the offence has been condoned or the affinity has recovered. Should he, on the other hand, grow worse or collapse altogether and die, the explanation is just the reverse. Then offering follows offering, and other oracles and doctors are consulted, until some change is effected in the order or course of events—for the spell of the diabolical witches has fallen upon the house.

Idols, figures, images, or objects of any sort are never abused or beaten, for according to popular philosophy, pervaded as it is by this dualistic principle of tit for tat—*i.e.* of act and react—and the inevitable dread of consequences, it is surmised that the mediators would refuse to listen, or to convey their messages, or to represent their wants to the ancestral deities. Indeed their wilful misrepresentation is more than probable.

Weighing the situation, and reviewing the possibilities and advantages from both sides, universal opinion is in favour of good treatment; therefore cajolery and persuasion are employed, and good treatment in general is accordingly meted out to the indispensable.

Indeed this feature of mediation is as much a part of the lives of these natural people as propitiation. For if it takes two to make a quarrel it requires a third party to settle it. And if natural life is divided into two phases, the human

and the spiritual, it is the indispensable mediator, and the mediator only (for the doctor, priest, or oracle, when consulted, occupies the same position), who connects the two and makes them into one. For mediation, associating or joining as it does two divided factors, is a principle very similar or akin to that which adjusts the balance or reduces disintegration to unity.

In placing food and water before their idols, it is not to the mere idol that the offering is made, but to the spirit it professes to represent. Looking on the matter in this light, therefore, and timorous as the Ibo are of the power for evil, which seemingly is even more entirely at the disposal of the spirits than the power for good, or which at all events is an infinitely more active element, the images are invariably treated well, and, as far as it is possible to learn, never beaten, and not often abused. But even patient, long-suffering, and spirit-ridden as these natives are, they are human after all, so that notwithstanding their natural timidity, when matters have not turned out well or to their liking, they lose their heads and become abusive. It is on occasions such as this that their unequal tempers give way and get the better of their discretion, and their natural love of talk and the instinct of litigation lures them on to a flow of strong and reproachful language.

Then it is that they discourse with the familiar spirit, and finding that the conversation is absolutely one-sided, and that they have failed to get the satisfaction which they consider their due, they forget themselves, and descend to the commonplace and vulgar.

But to do so the occasion must be important and the necessity imperative, for in their normal condition the terror inspired by the spirits is extremely effective, acting as it does in the arbitrary sense of moral and physical restraint. A restraint that, to a very great extent, as we have seen, is a moral factor in the self-government of the people. For although the power which is thus available, in the hands of unscrupulous persons is often abused, or turned to account in their own interests, as well as in the direction of evil, it is greatly limited by being confined to a small minority.

It is impossible to conclude this chapter without at least a casual reference to totemism.

For I have already indicated the fact that fetichism, idolatry, and totemism are merely expressions, conferred at various times of the world's history by certain more advanced sections of the human race on the beliefs of other backward sections, as definitions of specific religious formulas, which in reality represent a single formula, defined by the one word emblemism, as externally indicative of internal, ancestral spiritualism.

If the term totem, said to be of Chippeway origin, denotes an object, usually but not invariably an animal, between which and his tribe the savage believes that there exists a close kinship—as according to Dr. J. G. Frazer it does—then totemism expresses in one word the cult as it prevails among one and all of these Delta tribes.

This is all the more evident if the fact is taken into consideration that totemism is not a religion in itself, but merely the assumption of a religious aspect. For the analysis that has already been made regarding emblemism has shown us very clearly that it also is only a phase of a certain cult, and no more the religion of these natives than are the pictures, eikons, and images of the Greek and Romish Churches the religion of those various nations who profess these faiths, these symbols being merely the emblems and tenements of their various deities and spirits.

But, however, if totemism implies that the savage in the kinship alluded to traces his descent from the totem in question, irrespective of the fact that it is an animal, vegetable, or material object, then totemism, as it is now accepted, and the emblemism of the Delta are two separate or at least different features. For, as I have more than once explained, it is not to the emblem itself, *i.e.* it is not to the actual animal or object, but to the ancestral spirit inside it—in other words, to the human father with whom the spirit had been associated—that the Delta natives trace their descent. Their belief is that these symbols were chosen by their ancestors as suitable and convenient objects to reside in, with a view to repose and adoration, or in accordance with the ruling jurisdiction, and that it is



in consequence of this spirit-residence that the emblems are treated as sacred, and not by any means on their own account. Touching upon this subject, as I have done, consciously and directly, as well as unconsciously and indirectly, in so many different sections and chapters, it is not my intention to enlarge upon it further, especially in the direction of totemism; but speaking merely from general knowledge and a wide experience of Oriental and African nationalities, I have no hesitation in stating that, in my humble estimation, totemism, regardless of locality or race, is nothing more or less than emblemism pure and simple, as it now exists among the tribes of the Niger Delta.

Looking at the whole question from the natural standpoint, the reader will observe that while fetichism is most accurately described as natural, idolatry as artificial, or at least imitative, and totemism as tribal or ancestral emblemism, it is but reasonable and rational to apply the term as applicable to and covering all three, because in the native mind there is in reality no such distinctive difference between them as that which ethnology has laid down.

With this conclusive remark, it will now be my endeavour in the following pages to discuss the so-called worship of trees, stones, animals, and other natural elements, in order to prove that in practically each case, irrespective of the form or exterior of the emblem, the adoration is not paid to the object or element itself, but to the object or element as being the symbol containing and representing the ancestral deities of households, communities, and tribes, and in the latter aspect as being in this capacity the operators of the elements in question.



## CHAPTER III

### EMBODIMENT IN TREES

TREES have always occupied, and to a certain limited extent still occupy, a very prominent part, not only in the evolution of Nature, but in the history, and more particularly in the religions, of the human races.

As we have seen in Section IV., according to the Ibo and other tribes in the Delta, trees and plants have souls and a life which are peculiar to the vegetable world, but on a scale lower than that of the animal. Apart from this, however, certain trees have been and are selected as the haunts or residences of human spirits, who have elected (that is, with the consent of the ancestral authorities) not to go either to the land of spirits or to this world of strife, but to remain for ever in perpetual rest.

These trees, naturally, are held in very great reverence, and the people of the household or community pray to them, offer them sacrifices, and in some cases build Ju-Ju houses, and have priests for them. The priest is generally selected from the family to whom the tree belongs, but is not necessarily the eldest son of the house, though frequently the eldest member of it.

In every Ibo community such sacred trees and tree deities and spirits are also to be found.

Groves and woods, and those portions of the bush close to every town which are reserved as burial-grounds, are considered sacred, and worship is paid to either the spirits or the deities who inhabit or preside over them.

A spirit is not necessarily assigned to each tree or kind of

tree, nor is there any special form of spirit either for trees in general or for any one tree in particular, but every grove or forest belonging to a community has its own guardian deity.

The idea with regard to this especial aspect of spirit life is one that in its principle is practically Buddhistic, and to paraphrase the Hindu maxim, there can be no doubt whatever that as is the man in the flesh, so is the spirit in the tree. To make my meaning clearer, the wish is father to the thought, and the wish of a man, often expressed during his lifetime, that after death, in preference to remaining in spirit land or returning to this world, he intends to select a tree as his spiritual residence, is acted upon by the son or family when the event takes place. This remark, of course, applies with equal force to other objects—animal, vegetal, or material. In this way, too, the actual object is chosen by the old man himself in the compound of the ancestral house or on the farm, and if he happens to have been a hunter, or of a retiring disposition, in some out of the way secluded spot in the thickest part of the ancestral forest. In this manner trees or other symbols have most undoubtedly been chosen by former ancestors. Indeed, they are being chosen down to this very day, and incessant offerings are made to them, as for countless generations preceding they have been made, not to the objects, but to the spirits who are believed to reside in them.

By way of illustration, an excellent example of this is to be seen at Onitsha, in a tree said to have been planted fourteen generations—presumably about 200 years—ago by Tsimba, the first king, whose deified spirit still resides therein, and to whom great honour and reverence are paid by the whole community.

Similarly all over the Delta sacred trees are to be found in every town and in every household, so much so that if they could but relate merely their own experiences they would unfold a history of the people which, if not complete, ought at least to prove instructive. So it is because of an association and precedent that, as far as they know, began with the very first of their fathers, trees representing spirits and powers of the departed stand in every part of the country, as sacred and giant sentinels, keeping watch and ward over all below. For,

as I have previously pointed out, they are nothing more or less than the resting-places of these spirits; and as a proof of how earnest is the observance of these people with regard to them, the ground in their vicinity is not tilled, nor is even the bush cut down or cleared, for fear of disturbing their rest, and so incurring their wrath.

In the same way, on every farm or plantation it is customary to have a protecting spirit or deity, usually the spirit of some prominent former member of the household, who has selected a tree for his resting-place. Among the Efik the tree which is most often chosen is called *parando*. Once a year a goat and fowl are sacrificed and offered to the spirit, along with yams, plantains, and nimbo-palm wine, with the usual petition for a year of good crops and prosperity. This, in a word, is the purely local representation of the god of crops, who is common to every community.

In the Ibibio and also in the Efik country, *Akwabibio* (the second day of the week) is set apart and observed for the worship of a plant of a special kind, which is grown in the yard or compound of every house. At the foot of this one or two earthen pots are placed, containing some bitter water or medicine. On the shrub itself is hung the shell of a tortoise, and alongside of it human skulls are generally to be seen. The medicine is never emptied, but the pots are always refilled on this day of weekly ceremonial, when the usual petition for preservation, protection, prosperity, and safety for the household and its members is always offered by the head or the eldest son to the ancestral deities through the spirit-father or medium.

At this same shrine (which in certain ways reminds me of the *tulasi* plant, the Hindu woman's favourite divinity), on every occasion that members of the family or intimate friends either arrive at or leave the house on an important occasion, a special sacrifice of a goat and fowl is made to ensure safety and success in the journey or venture, or as a thanksgiving offering. Indeed, the more we look into the religion of these naturally religious people, as we shall do later on when examining the ritual and ceremonial of their faith, the more struck we shall be with the exceedingly close resemblance

that exists between their strict observance of religious rites and ceremonies in connection with all affairs of state and household and the official piety which so distinguished the early Romans.

Ani, the ancestral manes of Ogbe-abri, a town near Onitsha, is a tree god, who is satisfied with the sacrifice of a fowl and the offering of a piece of white cloth. At Isiokme there is a sacred grove, inside which is built a mud temple to Ede-mili, the god of crops, who himself resides in a stone, and who, in addition to the crops, confers on his devotees the power of making or withholding rain.

Ofo, the god of justice and truth on the Niger, also resides in a tree of the same name, and is appealed to by those who, having a grievance, consider that right is on their side.

Osisi, an enlarged form of Ofo, also a tree, is an aristocratic edition of a democratic god, who is reserved exclusively for chiefs of the first rank and upwards. A man, however, is permitted to keep his ancestral Osisi after he has become a chief. In Brass, a creeper or liana, which grows in the bush, and which is considered by the natives to bear a striking resemblance to Ogidiga, the python, the living emblem of their national god, is worshipped by the natives, and a severe punishment—usually a fine—is inflicted on any one who cuts it down or burns it. Indeed, even if this is done unintentionally when clearing the bush, the performance of certain ceremonies and sacrifices is obligatory in expiation of what is considered a very grievous offence. So, too, the African oak is considered sacred, and as such is used for building purposes only. Also the leaf of the mangrove, which is used for wrapping round the toe-nails of deceased persons, which are kept as relics.

There is in existence a tree that is not only found in Southern Nigeria, but which is, I believe, common to West Africa, that bears a red fruit, called blood-plum (*Hæmatostaphis barteri*). Whether it is universally worshipped or not I cannot say, but that in some sense it is under an outside influence is illustrated by the tradition which is prevalent among many of the coast tribes, that persons who commit adultery under its shade can come to no harm.

It is a curious and immoral belief, to say the least of it,



from a civilised standpoint, but when the sociology of these people is understood, and their customs are taken into account, the immorality does not appear in quite so glaring a light as it does at first sight. Indeed, polygamy, when overdone, as it is at times, is to a great extent responsible for the offence of adultery. For it is a common occurrence for wealthy men, in spite of age, to keep on marrying young girls, whose affections, in nine cases out of ten, are bestowed on younger but less eligible suitors; and as in cases of this kind it is possible for the number of wives to amount up to four or five scores, the result can be better imagined than described. Yet the natural result follows, and is in no sense deterred by the fear of the usually severe punishments inflicted, which consist in fines as a general rule; but in the case of the adultery being committed with the wife of a big chief, in a public flogging and exposure of both offenders, with mutilation of the ears, and in some cases death.

It is evident, then, that the blood-plum is looked on as a tree of refuge, within the protection of some powerful and amorous spirit, who so extends his influence that those who offend against the moral law within his shady precincts can do so with impunity.

In other words, it is no doubt a loophole, in some way connected with the system, which allows certain places—the altar in Ju-Ju houses, for example, and in some cases a particular bush or a tree—to be kept as sanctuary for those persons who have been condemned to death, practically on the same principle as the Levitical Cities of Refuge.

Although the Yoruba are quite outside the Delta limit racially and in other respects, among those sections of them which have not embraced Mohammedanism there is little real difference sociologically, certainly not as regards religion.

Trees are held by them in great esteem and veneration. Of Aluki, a slender prickly plant which grows in the bush, it is believed that, when the surrounding forest gets on fire, out of respect for the indwelling spirit it escapes without so much as being singed. Asorin, called the "Father of trees," is a large tree, reverently worshipped, and of which they say that it never grows in a grove, but always in a position that com-



mands the stream. From the hard wood of ayan, the club of Sango, the god of thunder and lightning, also of fire, is made. They have a proverb to the effect that "Ayan resists an axe," implying the resistance of the animating spirit of the tree against the spirit of the weapon. Of the apa, presumably the African mahogany, it is said, "If a child treat the Apa tree insolently it wounds his head," *i.e.* as a symbol of vengeance, "but if he treats the Troko"—a tree with hard reddish wood, also a kind of mahogany—"civilly, it welcomes him," *i.e.* as an emblem of refuge. Both these trees, or rather the spirits in them, are reverently worshipped. Two other Yoruba proverbs run, "An axe enters a forest, we hear a sound; the axe that cuts the tree is not afraid, but the woodsman performs charms for his defence." "One cannot bless the gods without using the word Akisale," a running creeper with a pod rather like the pea.

The offerings and sacrifices made to tree spirits are practically the same as those made to other deities, connected and associated as the ceremonial is with the main ancestral cult; but that in recent years these have been to some extent modified there can be no doubt, fruits, fowls, goats, dogs, and cloth forming as a rule the chief sacrificial items, and in smaller matters eggs and gin, or rum. The use of cloth is no doubt comparatively modern, and is easily explained by the facility with which it can be fastened or festooned on to the branches, while the other offerings are invariably placed on the small altars or inside the toy temples, which are built at the foot of the tree, generally within the buttresses or against the trunk.

It is worthy of remark that while white baft is much esteemed by the sylvan gods of Onitsha and other Ibo deities, it is just the reverse with the Yoruba divinities, as is well illustrated by the following proverb, "Ala fumfun ota' Orisa,"—a white cloth is (as) an object of hatred to the gods, because it is worn out in their service.

In consequence of this, while in some parts of the Delta black is taken exception to, in other localities other colours are forbidden or objected to. So it was that when I was at Azagba Ogwashi—a town on the western bank of the Niger, behind Asaba—unaware of local prejudices, I gave the king,

an old man, a cloth with dark blue spots, which he at first declined to accept, thinking these were black, because, as he solemnly informed me, this colour was not allowed by Olissa Ebulu Usa,—God, the maker of the world.

The fact of the matter is, that these various local prejudices regarding different colours resolve themselves into a question of social emulations and rivalries between neighbouring communities, that in the first instance have been utilised by the priests, to their own personal advantage, in only permitting certain colours and placing tabu on all others, a restriction that is, of course, prescribed by the convenient and inevitable divinity whose mouth-pieces they are.

Colour, however, is not by any means the only human article or concern in which these very anthropomorphic gods take an interest or put a tabu, for it applies with equal force to all descriptions of goods and every phase of life. Indeed, there can be no doubt that it was on this same principle, outcome as it was of the ancestral system and of expanding communities, that, as I have elsewhere pointed out, all the local deities, whose number is countless, came into existence.

Although among the Delta natives *tombo*, or palm wine, is not glorified as a deity to the exaggerated extent that soma was by the Aryans, this identical idea of spirituality pervades it, as it does everything material in their life; and the act of intoxication, and the frenzy of the priests, prophets, and diviners during possession, as in the case of hysteria and madness, is looked on in a similar light. No reservations, however, are made regarding *tombo*, or imported spirits, which are drunk by all alike; but it is needless for me to remark that the Delta priesthood in reserving to themselves the sacrificial perquisites that are offered to the deities, do so strictly within their rights. For as representing the latter, and as having the sole privilege of carrying within their bodies at certain periods the divine spirits, they are from the accepted standpoint in every sense entitled to them.

The Delta natives, in addition to their belief in the animating principle of the vegetable world, believe that plants, like men and animals, have their own spiritland, where their souls go to when the plants wither and die—an excellent

illustration of the fact that emblemism, although an absolute necessity, is altogether a subordinate adjunct of the spiritual pith, the basis and structure of which, as we have seen all through, is entirely and essentially ancestral.

The custom alluded to is in connection with coco-nut trees, up which all people are forbidden to climb on Eke, the first day of the week, which is a day of rest, and a market day. This prohibition is in honour of the protecting deity, also, so that every one in the town should be present in case of any accident or disturbance occurring in the market-place.

Further, with regard to these trees it is ruled that when the fruit falls of its own accord, or is blown down, it is not on any account to be eaten until it has been cut into two equal halves, and the milk poured out on the ground as an offering to and in honour of the same ancestral god of protection.

For here, as in every similar instance, apart from all other considerations, irrespective of the fact that the emblem is a tree or an animal of substantial utility—an element that especially appeals to these natives—the precautionary measures that are adopted are not taken so much out of deference to, or for the good of the tree or the animal, as out of respect for the ancestral gods.

## CHAPTER IV

### EMBODIMENT IN STONES

OF this very ancient cult there is little if any evidence in the Delta, especially along the coast-line, for the very simple reason that no stones of any kind are to be found among the swamps of the alluvial mud deposits. Indeed, it is only at some distance from the sea, where the country breaks into a more elevated and rockier formation, that traces of them are to be seen in various parts.

In spite of this, however, right down at Bonny, on the sea, the Ibani formerly had as one of their departmental deities one Tolofari, who was represented by a stone which had evidently been brought down from the Ibo interior by one of their Ibo ancestors. As low down as Eket also, on the Kwa Ibo river, some 30 miles from its mouth, right in the middle of the Ikot Ibon coffee plantation belonging to Mr. George Watts of Liverpool, there is a small clump of bush which the natives have never allowed the manager to cut down or clear away. The reason of this is simple. The bush in question is sacred to them, as containing the "King of the Bush," who lives right in the heart of it, and the popular belief is that if the foliage was destroyed they too would all perish. The king is an egg-shaped slab of white granite, weighing about 10 lbs., with a vein like a blush of pink running through its length. The natives are altogether ignorant of its history. How it, the only stone in the vicinity, got there, or where it came from, is a blank and a mystery, which renders it all the more sacred. For the spirit it contains is in their eyes all the more powerful and malignant, consequently has to be taken

all the more care of and propitiated, so as to leave no loophole for him to vent his destructive powers upon them.

As the geological formation all around Eket is a top-soil of black loam, 5 feet in thickness, mixed with sand, underneath which is a strata of clay, the inference is that if the stone is not an aerolite it must have been carried a long distance, for right up to Bende, some 80 miles from here, neither granite nor quartz is to be seen.

Unfortunately, during the period of my association with them, the natives of this locality, like all the Ibibio, were openly and avowedly hostile to white men in general, and to the Government in particular, so that I was never able to obtain, even from the few who were seemingly friendly, any reliable information regarding the esoteric mysticism of their faith. This is all the more a pity, as it more than once occurred to me that there was just the possibility of tracing a connection—indirect and remote beyond doubt—between the principle and the conception which were associated with the mysterious Ibibio spirit, who, entering into this piece of adamant, had ensconced himself in the bush, and those which resulted in Sara-bhu,—he who was born in the thicket, one of the epithets of Karttikeya, or Skanda, who in the Aryan mythology was god of war, and the planet Mars. For though I came across no traces of astrology among any of these Delta tribes, the war god is common to one and all of them.

In Uwet—a town of the Cross river, higher up than Eket—is a stone, probably an aerolite, of considerable weight, which, the natives aver, fell from the sky during a tornado many years ago, presumably in the early part of the nineteenth century, and which they say was so hot when it fell that those who saw it could not touch it for a long time. It is about 16 inches in length and a foot in thickness and breadth, of irregular shape, without any edges or angles, but smooth and lustrous in appearance, of metallic sound, and of dense weight. As among the Ibibio of Eket, this stone is a sacred object, which is preserved by the people of Uwet with strict and jealous care.

Among the Ibo of the Ndoke clan, who live at Akwete, Nkwu Abasi, the principal god, is represented as residing in



a slab of stone which stands in the middle of a small stream that supplies the people with water.

At Ogbanika (a district in the Ibo interior behind Onitsha on the Niger) is a cave in which the god Ogba resides, right inside the heart of a large stone. This divinity, in spite of the opaque density of his stony environment, is an all-seeing spirit, who can detect crime, but especially theft. In other words, Ogba is a spiritual personification of the town diviner or detective, whose external appearance is a striking illustration of the proverb. For it is even more impassive and unreadable than the "inscrutable Sphinx," yet as penetrating as it is deceptive, allowing no thief to escape out of a clutch that is all-embracing. Indeed, this acute diviner, whose simplicity is an outcome of the deepest natural subtlety, works on the very certain and practical principle that the crime itself is the surest and safest detector. So when suspicion falls on a man the god instantly demands his presence in the cave, and there he is detained, at the divine will and pleasure, until a fine commensurate with his offence has been paid by his family. Previous to his release, however, the priest, in whose charge the deity is, smears the body of the culprit all over with mud, as evidence and proof of his guilt, also as an act and token of purification and release; while his family, to prevent the miscreant from further disgracing himself by committing suicide, from very shame act the part of consoler towards him so as to distract his thoughts.

At Onitsha itself, Olinri, the goddess mother of all, the nourisher of her children and the protector of her people from all evil and danger, is symbolised by some pieces of rock on the banks of the Niger. This presumably is the spot at which these people landed, when they migrated—over some two hundred years previously—somewhere from the neighbourhood of the city of Benin.

The Aro or Omo-Chuku, *i.e.* sons or children of God, from whom they trace their descent, are known among themselves as Ono-na-kum, *i.e.* the sitters on the stones. This name appears to have originated from the fact that the elders were, and always have been, in the habit of sitting on some large stones in front of their Ju-Ju house, when strangers

from afar came to consult their divining spirit on various religious or domestic questions, or to appeal to him in matters requiring mediation or arbitration.

That the stones in question, closely connected as they were with the service and the ritual of the deity, were esteemed as sacred, I have no doubt; but as their sacred town was hedged in by a tabu that was only approachable by force of arms, and as the Aro were our inveterate enemies, threatening with death any individual who dared to guide us into their locality, it was quite impossible to obtain any information regarding them.

Close to the town of Azagba Igwashi, on the western bank of the Niger, in the near vicinity of Asaba, is a stream called by the natives Ngbiligba, which means a bell, because the water makes a tinkling noise just like the sound of a bell. To the people of Igbouza, however, another town in the neighbourhood, it is known as Atakpo, after a big god of that name who lives inside the stream, and who has the power of conferring the gift of prophecy on those whom he selects.

The man chosen for this honour is obliged to live in the bush, close to the stream, for a certain period on probation, as it were, and when Atakpo finally makes a selection of him, he is obliged to carry four stones—one on his head, one on each shoulder, and one on his chest—without allowing them to fall, as far as the town. On his arrival there, these stones are deposited on a certain spot, and a house is built over them, and they then become the emblem of the god Atakpo, while the man so significantly selected becomes his Amuma or prophet.

Indeed, as far as the Delta is concerned, the question of this particular worship, as it is called, depends absolutely and entirely on environment. Therefore, as stones are scarce in the Delta, the utilisation of them as emblems is also scarce. But as the stone is merely symbolical like any other object, it is, as we have seen under the heading of Emblemism, a technical error to speak of it as a specific worship.

In India, the town or village deity is often represented by a simple stone. Indeed all over the great peninsula stones,

usually smeared with red lead as an offering, are worshipped, or rather the spirit mediums which they contain. Of these Shasti, protectress of children, who is a prime favourite, and the recipient of vows, oblations, and worship, especially from women, is, as a rule, a stone about the size of a man's head, which is placed at the foot of a sacred tree.

A goddess similar to, if not identical with Shasti, is found among all these Delta tribes, usually fashioned, however, in mud or wooden idols, or to be found in various objects. Represented as a full-grown woman, sometimes with two or three children, she is looked upon with great regard as a doctor, possessing great virtues as a healer. Families in which there has been undue mortality among the children always patronise this motherly goddess, in the hope of checking the ravages of the death spirit.

Among the Delta natives implements are treated with great care, and as fully entitled to respect, altogether apart from their various domestic or outside uses. In this way the farmer has the greatest veneration for his farm implements, as the fisherman has for his nets, the trader for his measures and goods, both of them for their paddles, and the hunter for his bows and arrows and guns. For no matter how insignificant the objects may be, and despite the fact that they are only of use when manipulated or utilised by their own hands, to these natives each individual one of them possesses a soul of its own that in their eyes gives it a special and a peculiar significance.

Indeed, to such an extent do they carry this veneration that, as regards the defilement of all kitchen utensils, the strictest rules are always observed, a woman, *e.g.* not being allowed to handle them with her left hand,<sup>1</sup> or when she is unclean because of her menstruation; and on the birth of

<sup>1</sup> It is obvious that with regard to the hands, the right has always been looked upon as an instrument for good, as the left was for evil, and in this way the right hand came to betoken friendship and the left hand enmity. So the law among the Ijo and natives of Brass is that women are on no account to touch the faces of their husbands with the left hand, neither are they permitted to eat food or handle it in any way when cooking with any other hand but the right; while among the Ibo and other tribes the privilege of drinking with the left hand is only extended to experienced warriors who have killed men in war-time with their own hands.

twins—looked on as this is as unnatural and monstrous—all domestic utensils in use are at once destroyed. In addition to all these precautions, however, spiritual supervision is considered necessary, and it is usual, as a rule, for the women to keep a kitchen god, in the capacity of domestic overseer, to watch over the food, as well as over the pots and pans in which this is cooked.

The Delta people, in the same way, only look on and then worship an object as sacred when the spirit of some local or other divinity, or of some revered ancestor, has occupied and thus sanctified it. Other similar objects have no attraction of any kind for them, and these selected ones only because of their spiritual sanctifications. But in ordinary boundary-stones, unless erected with some such specific purpose, which is, of course, not unlikely, it is not exactly easy to see any reason why any divine associations should be attached to them.

Many instances of this nature fell within my province when I was out in Southern Nigeria, and on more than one occasion I have been the means of settling, to the satisfaction of all concerned, cases that had been in dispute for several generations, and in this way the cause of a standing feud between two communities, resulting in many fights and deaths on both sides.

This question of boundaries, in a country where land is as sacred and as personal a matter as the individual, more so if anything, and in which, in place of unity and nationality, there only exists isolation and discord, is a question that, unfortunately, is always in evidence, as the larger and more aggressive communities are invariably encroaching on the weaker and smaller.

In such cases there is most undoubtedly a significance attaching to the objects—trees, as being more in evidence and available on the spot, being utilised more frequently than stones, or, as sometimes happens, both together—which are set up to mark and define certain boundaries. Not because these are specially the recipients of any particular deities or spirits, but on account of the fact that when the boundaries between the two contending parties have been fixed, the compact is ratified by a religious ceremony. This consists of each



party swearing an oath, on one of its own ancestral emblems, to abide faithfully by all the terms of the agreement, the result of which is everlasting prosperity and peace, the breakers of the oath, on either side, being consigned to eternal perdition and the torments of disembodied evil. It is customary, in fact, in all cases and on all occasions on which compacts, agreements, or treaties are made between two communities, to ratify the bond by a religious ceremony which, as just explained, consists of a sacred covenant mutually sworn on the respective deities of protection, accompanied, as a rule, by a sacrifice, which, according to the nature of the business, rises in an ascending scale, from a fowl to a human being if, after having been at war with each other, the contending parties have agreed to terms of peace. It is probable, too, that on such occasions the boundary symbols are tenanted by spirits who have been requisitioned by both sides, sacrificially or otherwise, to watch over their mutual interests.

That human and animal sacrifices were offered to stone deities, *i.e.* deities who were symbolised by stones, in exactly the same way and on the same lines and principle, is quite evident from the fact that among these Delta tribes they are still offered. For, as in Jacob's case, the stone emblem is but the god's house, *i.e.* the house in which the god resides. A selection, that was most undoubtedly one of convenience and association, more so, in fact, than of environment, synchronising, as these did, with certain personalities, events, and localities.

So among these natives, irrespective of tribe or locality, whether their remote ancestors ever worshipped trees or stones on their own account, and not because of the tenant spirit, they themselves adore the spirit and not the mere emblem, although, of course, in doing so they do so through the latter. It must be acknowledged, however, that from a really practical standpoint this is immaterial to the question at issue. What is ever so much more material to it, from every natural aspect, is the fact that originally a tree or a stone, for instance, as a something—a piece of personal property with which natural man was associated—excited in him the same feeling of awe and mystery that any object did, which to him was incomprehensible, all the more so because of its great utility to him.



## CHAPTER V

### EMBODIMENT IN ANIMALS AND REPTILES

IT must have long ago been obvious to the reader that the so-called worship of animals was nothing more or less than the worship of ancestors. For, as I have shown, the belief of these natives as regards animals is merely symbolised, so that it is quite feasible to connect them as mere repositories of the souls of certain ancestors; the animals were regarded as sacred, and were worshipped, not for any special characteristics of their own, but as containing the essence of those who had ruled, and who had been feared on account of their ferocious qualities, or unusual power and prowess, or unique subtlety, all of which had been inspired by the spirits of certain specific animals or reptiles who had obsessed them.

The fact that it was not so much the size and the strength of animals as their cunning, sagacity, and agility which impressed natural man has been commented on in the early chapters on religion, and instances were then adduced to show how closely connected were animal and human instincts. Let us, however, now take an instance in which the characteristics of the former appear to have impressed the latter in such a marked manner, as to have influenced man's opinion regarding an intelligence that he was almost inclined to place on a level with his own, simply because it was an absolute mystery to him. It is not so difficult a matter as it may at first sight appear to trace out from its very source the original conception of the tortoise, which culminated in a belief concerning its attributes that, in the eyes of these Delta natives, elevated it to the sovereignty of the beasts of the forest. But to do so

we must first of all acquaint ourselves with the habits of the animal in question.

Absolutely harmless and inoffensive in himself, the tortoise does not prey on even the smallest of insects, but subsists entirely on the fallen fruits of the forest. On the approach of an enemy he makes no attempt even to move, but withdraws his projecting limbs inside the outer shell and quietly awaits results.

In the gloomy forests of the Delta there are only two enemies who are capable of doing him any serious injury. The one is man, who is able to lift him up and carry him bodily away, which, however, he does not do, except in those instances in which the animal is regarded as sacred and required in connection with certain religious ceremonies. His other and most dangerous enemy is the python, who having first of all crushed him by means of the enormous power of constriction which it can apply, swallows him alive, shell and all. But pythons large enough to do this (unless the tortoise happens to be very young and small) are very scarce, so that he has not much to apprehend in that quarter.

To the elephant—herbivorous like himself—he is too insignificant, for unlike the mosquito or the sandfly he has no sting; and although they meet in fable, in real life the hippopotamus and himself are not much thrown together. From the leopard or the bush-cat (one of the genet species) he has nothing to fear, for their teeth cannot penetrate his hard shell, nor can a stroke from the paws of the former or the claws of the latter do him any damage. Thus it is that, thanks to the impenetrable shell-back armour with which Nature has provided him, the tortoise has been practically immune from attack and destruction, which fact in a great measure explains the reason of his longevity.

There is yet another physical characteristic, however, that has most undoubtedly influenced these natives very considerably in arriving at an opinion that, to the European, appears to be so preposterously exaggerated, even from the phantasmal glamour of a fairy tale or beast fable. This is the fact that the animal in question can exist longer without food than perhaps any other animal of its own gloomy forests, or indeed of other

countries, the ant-bear of Brazil alone excepted. For although the solid and the substantial appeals directly and forcibly to natural man, even in the spiritual aspect of life this long abstinence and ability to exist without food also appeals to the mystic side of his nature, which assigns a spirit origin or influence to everything that is a mystery to him, no matter how material or lifeless it may be; because, according to his idea, there is no matter in existence that cannot be spiritualised, *i.e.* animated by a spirit. Add to this immunity his habitual silence, the sedentariness of his habits, the extreme and deliberate slowness of his movements, and his natural instinct of keeping himself out of sight, and the observer begins to understand the reasons that have actuated the Delta natives in regarding him as a peculiarly mysterious, therefore intelligent creature. So, also, is it easy to understand how, in process of time, the word which stood for tortoise became a synonym for cunning and craft, and a man of exceptional intelligence was in this way known among the Ibo as Mbai, and among the Ibani as Ekake, meaning a tortoise. For although he of the shell back was slow he was sure, as the old Greek Æsop tells in his fable of the tortoise and the hare. This sureness in the native mind in itself implied doggedness and a fixed determination of purpose, while silence and secrecy implied mystery and a veiled purpose. This, surely, was a sufficiently logical reason for mystery.

As a perfect illustration of all these characteristics I cannot do better here than give in full the Efik fable.

"Many, many moons since, in the days when the world was young, a great tree grew in the world. So tall and strong did it grow that it grew beyond the strength of all the different creatures and powers on earth either to injure or destroy it. So one day Abasi,—god the creator,—who feared that the tree might grow too powerful, called together all the men, the animals, and the birds who were in the world, and proclaimed to them that to him who overturned and humbled the tree he would give his daughter in marriage. No sooner had this announcement been made than all who heard it—men, animals, and birds of every kind—commenced at once to make the attempt. But desperate though these were they were quite fruitless, one and

all of them ending in failure, without in any way making the slightest impression on the tree. For it took no more notice of them than the elephant does of the mosquito, but waved its branches about as if in evident pleasure, as it shook with a laughter that was at times as sonorous as the deep-toned thunder, and at others as silent as the great forest when the hush of the slumbering spirits falls upon it. Even the Ikpun Kpun Kpun Ine—a fabulous mammoth infinitely larger than the elephant—had hurled his enormous strength against it, but in vain, and had been obliged to retire, baffled and enraged.

“When one and all of them had expended their energies, the tortoise, who had all this time waited very patiently, at length declared his intention of levelling the mighty tree to the earth. At this all the great ones laughed aloud at his presumption. So great indeed was their laughter that it shook the world, including the great tree, to its very foundations, just as if it were a raging tornado. Without saying a word, however, the tortoise went to work with great tenacity and infinite secrecy, and engaging the assistance of the ground (white) ants he burrowed underneath the tree. Then when this had been done, together between them they cut all the roots that were young and soft, until the tree was so weakened that a very small effort turned it over.”

However the European may attempt to interpret this legend, even if it is to the extent of proving the unmistakable pantheism of the people, and the very evident oneness to them of all Nature, the exception—if this were the interpretation—but proves the rule.

Looking, however, into the antecedents of this matter, as these natural people have done, these three salient characteristics of silence, mystery, and determination implied originally a much greater significance to these primitive and emotional thinkers than we, in spite of our boasted acumen, can now comprehend with any degree of facility; for while the virtue of silence was, so to speak, more than golden, connected as it was with the divine in nature, mystery, certainty, and immutability—such as they saw in the fixity of purpose which underlay and prevented dissolution from detaching itself from reproduction—appealed to them as the divine itself.



Therefore, insignificant as he was from an external aspect, the tortoise was regarded by these natives as possessing the human, in other words divine attributes of truth, justice, and wisdom. No wonder, then, that the animals chose him to be a king and a judge over them; and still less cause for surprise is it when we find him figuring among certain of these tribes as an object of veneration and a sacred emblem. Reading between the lines, it is at once discernible that in this, as in every other instance, the connection was entirely one of ancestral association, which affords the explanation of the tortoise's unique intelligence, for in native belief the higher or human intelligence is derived entirely from spiritual action. And even the fable, when looked at from the native standpoint, supports this idea, connecting the tortoise as it does with the deity through his matrimonial alliance with the creator's daughter; because stripped of its symbolism, as originally it undoubtedly was, the principle involved is spiritual, pure and simple.

Examining, as I have done, numbers of their fables and anecdotes—all of which concern the animal world—it is at once evident that these natives have inherited from their prehistoric ancestors the same disregard for size and strength as they had regard for cunning and adroitness. For animals like the elephant, the hippopotamus, and the leopard, for instance, do not figure so extensively or so frequently as the tortoise or the mosquito, though the leopard, among the interior tribes, the Ibo particularly, is a strong favourite.

Reptiles, snakes, and crocodiles particularly are much more utilised as emblems, simply, it is to be presumed, because they are more in evidence in the forests and rivers of the Delta than any other species of animals, consequently must have appealed to the natives as the most convenient and suitable repositories for the ancestral manes. On the same principle among the coast tribes the shark, until recent years, was held as sacred, and among the Ibani the iguana occupied the same exalted position. But with the exception of the shark, Dema, a deity to whom sacrifices were made, which was selected for its voracious ferocity, it is evident that most of these emblems were chosen because of the craft and subtlety



that distinguished them—for the crocodile, *e.g.* is cowardly and cunning, and even the leopard is sly and stealthy.

Among the interior tribes, as we have already seen, right throughout Southern Nigeria, all fish and reptiles that inhabit the streams are, along with the water, looked on as sacred, the penalty of death being inflicted on any person who either kills or eats them. It is almost needless to remind the reader that it is not on account of the animal that the life of the delinquent is demanded, but on account of the ancestral spirit contained in the body of the animal. So, to reduce this question to its native basis, a human life is considered equal to a spiritual because of the soul-spirit that it contains.

Yet although in many localities animals and reptiles represent the ancestral or protecting deities of the clan or community, no tribe or clan that I know of is named after any particular animal or reptile; indeed, in all my varied experience, I only came across one small district which was called Ama Ago, or the country of the leopard, and this distinctly applied as much to the locality as to the people; although, as in Mbeari, so in many parts of the Ibo country, the leopard is a sacred emblem which, as a rule, is roughly modelled out of clay or mud.

With the immense mass of material at my disposal it is quite impossible, in a work of this nature, to say all that I should like to on a subject so deeply interesting, still, before concluding this chapter, there are two or three features which it is necessary to bring to the reader's notice.

1. *Birds*.—The first of these is with regard to the attitude of the people towards birds. Not because from an emblematic standpoint they make any specific difference between them and other animals, but because they are rather more inclined to connect them with the element of air or wind than with that of earth and of water, therefore in a vague and mysterious way with the sky and the divinities, including the Creator connected therewith. This attitude is to be specially seen in their fables, from which also it is possible to infer that in this sense birds are regarded with less fear and more in the light of friendly affinities than animals are. One of these, although it is relative principally to the amour of one of the many

wives of the wizard king of a nameless country, is exceedingly interesting as well as instructive in that respect.

This woman, by name Toru-ibi, *i.e.* of a fair countenance, becomes greatly enamoured with the son of a great chief of the same country, whose name, Sobie-owi,—a person descended from the sky, is, to say the least of it, suggestive of the native belief in divine descent. Toru-ibi, in the most determined way, tastes not merely the coco-nut and the milk that is in it, but cultivates and cherishes, in fact, the whole tree of temptation in the manly form of her heaven-born lover, until the passion which is consuming her is promptly reciprocated by the comely youth. The king, with his magic powers, soon discovers the intrigue, and during the night, when they are sleeping peacefully and dreaming of love, he comes into the room and chains them both together. In the morning when they awake the queen, who, if she is not gifted with supernatural powers, certainly possesses a will and a way of her own, nothing daunted at the unlooked-for dilemma, manages with the assistance of her three sisters to unfasten the offending chain; but before parting from her lover she gives him certain instructions which he is to carry out to the letter. These are to the effect that as soon as ever the king summons his wives to undergo the ordeal of swearing the oath on the ancestral gods with regard to their chastity, he is to appear on the scene with two short sticks in each hand, and just as she is about to take the vow he is to step over the feet of herself and three sisters, who will be sitting on the ground alongside of her.

These behests are carried out most faithfully by Sobie-owi, down even to the smallest detail, and in spite of the fact that it is contrary to custom for a man other than the husband to step across or in any way to touch the person of a married woman,—an act which is open to the construction of adultery being put upon it,—Toru-ibi, having vowed her innocence, and thrown the implication on to her convenient sisters, is of course acquitted.

The second act of this natural drama unfolds itself in the courtyard of the palace. Previous to this, however, a dress rehearsal has taken place between she of the fair countenance

and he of heaven, in which the arch temptress again carefully instructs her lover in the course that he is to pursue. For Toru-ibi is ambitious, and aspires to become the first wife of Sobie-owi instead of, as she is, the second in importance of the wizard king, and she knows that the latter has told his elders in strict confidence that the kingdom is to be conferred by them on the person who can kill his bird-affinity (a feat that he apparently regards as impossible without the use of his own specific medicine), in the certain event of his own death following close on that of the bird.

The day arrives. The king has given a grand banquet, to which all the notables of his country have been invited, among them Sobie-owi. Most of his guests are seated in the courtyard, underneath the shade of the sacred ancestral tree. A dance has just been concluded. The king is standing alone, apart from the rest, unconscious—despite his magic—of the tragedy that is about to commence. Close to him is Toru-ibi, looking as if on the tip-toe of expectation to fulfil her lord's commands. On the top of the tall apa tree that grows close to the gateway a small brown bird is sitting. In this feathered object dwells the soul-affinity of his holiness the king, to kill which is to kill him. Through this tiny entrance lies the road to a fine kingdom and a great queen. All is exactly as she has predicted. The occasion and the omen are favourable, and the man is there, ready to rise to and seize it.

Saluting the king with becoming dignity, Sobie-owi in a deferential voice asks his father to give him a bow, three arrows, and permission to shoot the bird on the apa tree. His majesty, confident that he has put medicine, *i.e.* a spiritual spell on the bird, which will turn aside the flight of the straightest and swiftest arrow, graciously and readily grants permission, but warns the youth that he will be unsuccessful. Toru-ibi, as if sublimely unconscious of the dark plot which she has woven around her royal spouse, but desirous only to do as her master bids her, has edged a little nearer to him. Commanding her to bring the weapons she walks into the house with a slow and deliberate step, and returns in the same dignified manner with a bow and three arrows. Holding the

arrows in her left hand, she hands Sobie-owi the bow with her right, and after a short pause she takes one of the arrows and gives it to him, still retaining possession of the two others.

Fitting it in the bow, and looking like an alert and experienced warrior, he now takes careful aim at the bird and pulls the cord, but the arrow flies past it to the right. A certain measure of suppressed and dignified excitement now prevails among the elders, knowing, as they do, the relationship existing between the bird and the king, but his majesty, confident in his own powers, appears serenely and supremely indifferent.

But when the second arrow also misses, flying this time to the left of the target, even the monarch is scarcely able to suppress his triumphant feelings. Indeed, out of those present, the two principal actors in the drama are least of all unmoved.

There is but one arrow left now in Toru-ibi's hand, one chance more for the sky-born youth, and this she hands to him with even greater solemnity than before. He too looks at and almost caresses it, for in this last arrow is centred the twofold hope of a great achievement. In the accuracy of its flight the fate of four lives are concerned—two to sink and two to rise. Dipped as this particular weapon has been in the special medicine pot of the king,—in other words, spiritualised,—the spirit of the arrow, conscious as it were of its mission, and pregnant with the potentiality of its ability to decide the fate of two spirits in one stroke, poises itself in the air when released by Sobie-owi from the bow, and to the intense astonishment of the elders, most of all of the king, it pierces the bird through the heart.

But here in the third act, with the death of the king and the accession of Toru-ibi and her lover to the throne, the drama suddenly ends.

There is much to be learned from this exceedingly comprehensive story with reference to the spiritual beliefs and customs of these natives, which confirms in every way all that has been said in the preceding sections regarding the



connection between human beings and animals; and the inspiration more especially of all matter that is utilised for domestic and other purposes. If, however, any doubt should still exist as to the question of affinity, the following custom, trifling as it seems in itself, demonstrates it in perhaps even a more forcible manner. This is the fact, that a man on his way to fight, or proceeding on a perilous mission, at once turns back if it so happens that a bird lets fall its droppings upon him. For the interpretation placed upon this act is that it is one of design, the friendly warning of some soul-affinity that danger or death is in store for him if he proceeds, and in no sense is it ascribed to a mere accident, or looked upon as simply a bad omen. Accident, in fact, with these fate-infatuated people is not taken into account, because in their philosophy there is no such thing, and motive or design is always imputed (due invariably to spirit intervention), in all cases where human agency is not actually visible or palpable.

Yet within my own experience there are not—that I am aware of—many important bird deities or emblems in the Delta. The fish-hawk, Igo, as the Brassites call it, is held sacred by all the coast tribes, among whom there is, if anything, more veneration paid to birds than among the interior people. These hawks, equally with the python, monkeys, and other emblematic animals, are almost tame, allowing the natives to go close up to them, and the same laws exactly are observed towards them as exist for all sacred animals. In no sense is greater veneration shown to them than in the value placed upon their feathers, which, as we saw in Chapter II., Section IV., are worn on the head, not merely as an ornament, but as indicative of a life that has been taken in a righteous cause. Further, it is also customary among the Ibibio and others for the two envoys, who as men of mark and prominence have been selected by one community to announce the declaration of war upon another, to wear a long feather in their head-dress as indicative of their office and the sanctity of their persons.

To the Okrika—a wild and turbulent lot until quite recently—the small and inoffensive green pigeon is typical of some deified ancestor who watches over their best interests;



while formerly Finima was a bird deity greatly revered by the Ibani, the literal interpretation of the word being, the place or country of birds—presumably curlew and seagulls—a locality, or rather mud swamp, close to, but seaward of Bonny, which in olden days was a favourite resort of these birds. This has since been called Ju-Ju Town, and was esteemed sacred because it had been dedicated to the spirits of those ancestors who had chosen these birds as their soul affinities or embodiments.

2. *Secret Animal Societies*.—With reference to this other question a vast amount of matter also remains to be examined, for there is not in existence in any portion of the Delta a single community in which some form of secret society does not obtain. Although in many cases these are associated with the ancestral emblems, they are for the most part institutions which are responsible for the administration of the country, but more often than not they combine with this the purpose of popular recreation and amusement; such *e.g.* are the Okonko of the Ibo; the Epe and highly exclusive Mborko of the Aro; the Idion and Ekpe of the Ibibio; the Egbo of the Efik; the Ekene of the New Calabar; the Owu-Ogbo—purely for play—of the Ibani; the Ofiokpo of the Andoni, and others too numerous to mention. Yet although these societies are connected with their religion, as is only to be expected from the natural constitution of Delta society, they are evidently of a later and more modern development that has arisen out of certain pressing necessities, the most formidable of which has been to provide a countercheck to witchcraft. This, however, as a subject in itself, and as having nothing in common with the question at issue, will be dealt with on some future occasion under the heading of Law and Custom.

Contrary to expectation, and in face of their extraordinary animalistic beliefs, there is but little evidence regarding the existence of secret animal societies, *i.e.* societies in which the members represent themselves as animals, with the object of committing outrages on life and property. This is all the more a psychological puzzle when the existence of sorcery is

taken into consideration as a presumably monopolising factor; the only satisfactory explanation appears to be based on the assumption that greater secrecy, and therefore a corresponding security, is obtainable by operating in poisons. For in these sure and certain specifics—animated although they are by demons—reposes the priceless virtue of a voiceless silence, which in the end is able to exercise a greater spirit of terror among the timorous people than the wildest depredations of the most ferocious animals.

Connected, however, as this question indubitably is, with that of cannibalism, a feature which, as I have shown, is still practised under certain conditions by all these tribes, it would be only reasonable to infer the existence of such societies with the sole object of indulging this appetite for human food. But here also we are confronted by the fact that cannibalism as it now exists among them is purely a religious relic, with, as a natural sequence, its irreligious counterblast in the form of witchcraft, that is exercised only, or, as a rule, on the following occasions: legitimately (1) on captives taken in war; (2) in all cases of human sacrifice, made in connection with the burial sacrament: illegitimately, (3) by the members of the most secret and hated society of sorcerers; and (4) as a measure of retaliation—legal and in self-defence presumably—undertaken by the mutual protection societies.

These facts, it will be seen, clearly and unmistakably explain the absence of the leopard societies, such as those which prevail among the Temne and Mende tribes at the back of Sierra Leone. There is, however, among the Ibibio and interior Ibo a leopard secret society, not so much to kill people—except, of course, when they make any resistance—as to frighten and convince them, and under cover of this and the darkness of night, to steal yams and other property. The members dress in skins of animals, but principally in those of leopards—hence the name, and have a call which it is said is so excellent an imitation of the owl's that it is difficult to distinguish between them. Further, these men, who are known as "leopard men," have a system of calls among themselves, by which they can communicate with each other. In addition to

this, there are in every community regularly organised play clubs, which, like the administrative institutions, are confined exclusively to the wealthier classes through the imposition of heavy entrance fees and subscriptions, but these are merely an outlet for those milder and more human energies of joy and mirth which are invariably indulged in by the coast tribes when the seasons of fishing and trading in produce are over; and in the interior, after the gathering in of the harvest. These plays are more or less practised on the same lines as the Owu or mermaid plays, and are representative of various kinds of animals, such *e.g.* as leopards, hippopotamus, bush-cats, crocodiles, snakes, sharks, sword-fish, etc.; and there can be little doubt that they are a crude but dramatic effort which has resulted, first of all, from the natural instinct for an active manifestation of pleasure, and equally so, as a direct outcome of the life and occupation which has brought these people into personal touch with these creatures; there is also an evident association between these animal plays and the soul or kernel of that religious fabric which cannot detach itself from the inevitable naturism, not only of its surroundings, but of its own organisation,—a relic and connection, in fact, of those animal instincts which, evolving as they have done out of the soil and atmosphere of their own environment, have, as we have seen all through, made of them beings such as I have endeavoured to describe.

From a psychological standpoint there are only two more customs of importance—so far, at least, as my experience goes—that deserve mention here. The first of these is that, in the opinion of the natives, a poisonous fluid—the gall, presumably—is obtained from the viscera of the leopard and the python. Consequently, when one of these animals has been killed by a hunter belonging to some community in which neither is held sacred, the legitimate procedure on his part is to announce the fact publicly. A time is then appointed by the elders and chiefs, and, in the presence of the whole town, the carcass is cut open and the offending fluid there and then destroyed. Any individual, however, who is discovered offending against this law is at once classified as a sorcerer, and his society is shunned and dreaded in consequence; and should he be

suspected and found guilty of poisoning any one through this or any other means, he is promptly killed.

The other custom is, that when a hunter kills a large animal, an elephant or hippopotamus, for instance, he is obliged to present it to the oldest man in the town as a special sacrifice to the ancestral deities, before whom the animal is to be eaten.

## CHAPTER VI

### EMBODIMENT IN SNAKES

IF I have as yet made no special reference to this phase of naturism, or so-called animal worship, it is not on account of its non-existence in the Delta, but because of the standpoint from which the subject has been approached. For as far as the actual cult itself is concerned, quite apart from the specific aspect of emblemism, there is no difference whatever in the adoration that is accorded through the serpent and that which has for its medium any other reptile or animal, and indeed—to complete the comparison—any material object.

Yet in Benin city, at Nembe, Nkwerri, and in various localities all over the Delta, ophiolatry, so-called, exists and flourishes, as it has always done ever since natural man taught himself to associate the spirits of his ancestors with the more personal and immediate objects of his surroundings. And as snakes—living as they did in the olden days in caves and trees, and as they now do, not only in the towns, but inside the houses, underground as well as in the thatched roofs—were very closely associated with man, it is no wonder that they were early chosen to represent certain ancestral embodiments. Further, there can be little or no doubt that the fact of their attachment to the haunts and domiciles of human beings (attracted as they were, in the first instance, by the incentive of food, and subsequently by the regular provision which was systematically made for them) knit the bond of association between the reptile and the man still closer, looked at as the matter was from a spiritual and ancestral aspect. But although to this day he has not succeeded in domesticating even those



species which are harmless, these Delta folk, it must be conceded, have at least to some extent tamed the python, as well as other types of wild animals, such *e.g.* as crocodiles, iguanas, monkeys, etc.

Irrespective of tribe or locality, one fact in connection with these natives impressed me very forcibly, and that was that in every case, with regard to snakes, the emblem revered is the python, and not one of the poisonous varieties, such *e.g.* as the cobra or horned viper.

This is all the more remarkable because it is a practical demonstration of the existence in their ancestors of a distinct sense of moral appreciation and discrimination, which evolved, as we have seen, into an ethical system of adjustment. Thus it is that among their successors, while the snakes whose bite means death are looked on as representing the spirits of evil, the python—which, though non-poisonous, possesses the power of constriction, and unusual if not mysterious strength—is regarded, apart from ancestral or spiritual connections, as typical of the eternal element and the bifurcating energy that preserves the balance. This is shown not simply in the veneration which is paid to them as ancestral emblems; but from the standpoint of utility and substance it is seen in their treatment of the creatures in question, which are fed and tolerated to such an extent that in those towns in which they are sacred, although they become a pest and even a danger to the people, they are all the more pampered and spoilt.

An excellent illustration of this extraordinary fatuity, as it appears to the European, is to be seen in the case of Fishtown, a town belonging to the Brass tribe. The condition of this place previous to 1894 was, it seems, very similar to that of Bonny in the eighties, when it was infested by the sacred iguanas, only a great deal worse, for the whole town was literally alive and overrun with pythons. In that year, however—fortunately for the people, although they did not look at the matter in this light—a fire broke out, which not only demolished all the houses, but destroyed so great a number of these sacred creatures that the new town, which was rebuilt on the same site, has been comparatively free ever since.

It is impossible to produce better or more conclusive

evidence with regard to the cult in question, than by placing before the reader the following description of the treatment accorded to pythons by the Brass and other natives, which is the result of information collected for me, in addition to that of personal experience.

In many of the various districts of Southern Nigeria the python is the principal object of ancestral adoration. Known in Brass under the name of Ogidiga, it represents the tribal, and like Ekiba of the Ibani, the war god of the people. As I have already in this section, as well as in Part I., described his origin, it is unnecessary to say anything further on this point. It is, in the eyes of my native informants, extraordinary how tame and harmless these reptiles have become, all the more so because the art of snake-charming is unknown to the priests and diviners. As they feed principally on the fowls and goats, in lieu of the vermin which they have driven out, it is quite a common event of a morning to find in one hut as many as four, five, or even more pythons lying in a semi-comatose condition, after having swallowed some of the livestock which they had secured on the premises. Unwelcome as the sacred visitors are on this account, so great is the veneration in which they are held on account of the associations that are connected with them, so strict are the rules, and so severe are the penalties regarding them, that they are left unmolested, and the priests in the meantime are informed of their presence. Even then it is only after a certain ceremony has been performed by the latter that the snakes can be removed. After the due observance of this custom, the priests take up the pythons and carry them, either in their arms or coiled round their bodies, and deposit them in a certain part of the bush which is set apart for them. When, however, as it sometimes happens, these reptiles are of enormous size, they are carried on special stretchers, which are made for the purpose. The greatest care is taken in handling them, so that they should neither be hurt nor in any way disturbed or annoyed. What is more, any victim which has been strangled, but not eaten by them, is also taken into the bush and made over to them.

What appears to have astonished my native informants

is the occasional unruliness of these pampered creatures in attempting to swallow infants and young children, in other words, the youngest members of the ancestral circle. What, however, is even more enigmatical to the European mind than this ingratitude, is the fact that even in an emergency of this personal nature, when the life of a human being—in whom is centred all the love of a mother, and who may perhaps be to the father the last and only hope of perpetuating his own personality—is at stake, a priest, the High Priest if available, must be appealed to to rescue the child. Apart from religious considerations, or from those arising from social etiquette, it is obvious that the priests are called in because they possess the personal magnetism and art of manipulation to a much greater degree than the ordinary citizen. Not only this, however, but because of the mutuality of the magnetism which is established between themselves and their charges.

Looked at, however, from a wider standpoint, this mastery of the priests over the reptiles is in no sense surprising. For once more we are face to face with the sincerity of these sacerdotal diplomats with regard to the practice of their religion. And it is this sincerity and practice of ages which has given them, first of all, confidence and then courage, which has made them fearless, and enables them to handle these creatures with ease and impunity. No charming is therefore necessary, for here we have in association an infinitely closer bond, and a sounder and more magnetic training. Here we see the familiarity which, in place of breeding contempt, establishes an association between two varieties of natural evolution that have widely diverged from each other, or rather from the germ that is common to them both. An association of masterful sympathy on the part of the human being, and of appreciation and reciprocity on the part of the animal,—which lapses, however, in the case of the infants, whose insignificance and helplessness breaks the reciprocity, and acts also as an incentive to the animal lust for food.

Any person who by accident or design destroys the life of one of these reptiles is obliged to report the circumstance to the High Priest; and in the event of his failing to do so, he at once accepts all risk and responsibility, and brings upon

himself the react in the form of ancestral retribution, *i.e.* disease or death, which is inevitable, but which it is possible to prevent or forestall (although not with any measure of certainty) by procuring absolution through the priests. Should, for example, the accident have occurred while the offender was clearing some portion of the surrounding bush, the act is expressly forbidden to be spoken of as "one of killing," because, according to the opinion of the priestly experts, a deity or spirit does not die, even when the symbolic body has been destroyed. The Brass word to express this is "bogote," meaning literally missed or passed, *i.e.* an unintentional wrong. Another term in use is "ocebimote," the interpretation of which is, done him good, that applies to the penalty meted out to the destroyer of the sacred reptile. In presenting himself before the priests the offender is required to pay, as a preliminary fee, a bottle of rum or its equivalent in value of some other kind. The High Priest and priests then sit in solemn conclave and decide the case on its merits, death or the imposition of a fine forming the usual penalties which are inflicted; the former decision is imposed in the event of design or wilful intent being proven against the culprit. The death sentence, however, is remitted and absolution obtained on payment of a fine amounting from £10 to £12, in addition to the formula of a special purification ceremony, which consists in offering a substantial sacrifice, and in having a bath of the sacred chalk or mud, that is subsequently washed off with water. In accidental cases the fine imposed amounts, as a general rule, to the payment of six pieces of cloth and a bottle of spirits, equal in English money to about a guinea, or according to Brass reckoning to seven plates. This curious expression, "sonoma efere," in the vernacular, is only used in this particular case, and the explanation of it is that seven articles—invariably in goods of some description—are to be paid, and the value of these is expressed in plates, so that six pieces of cloth and a bottle of rum are considered as an equivalent for seven plates.

That there is some ancient and mysterious association attached to the number seven, and that it is on this account that the payment in question—connected with an outrage



against ancestral and sacerdotal emblemism—is reckoned, is a self-evident inference. For this number, in the eyes of these natives, has most undoubtedly a sacred significance, although their weeks consist either of eight days or of four. These rules and regulations, however, are, so to speak, quite modern, and considerably more relaxed than they were prior to the establishment of the British administration. For formerly the penalty for killing a python (or, as it still holds good among the interior tribes, of any sacred animal) was death, even in the case of big chiefs, and in spite of personal wealth, power, or influence. Further, it was the custom, as it is now in other parts of the country with regard to all sacred animals, that when one of these reptiles died from natural causes, contributions were generally levied, and it was buried with the same funeral rites and honours that a chief is entitled to.

What proof can be plainer, and what evidence can be stronger than this, that the rites in question are not made to the mere animal, or even soul of the animal, but that they are offered on behalf of the ancestral spirits, who are believed to be incarcerated in the animal embodiment?

None, indeed; for here, in the very act itself, the proof is absolute and conclusive. So all animals outside the sacred radius, even when feared, are killed, and if eatable, are eaten with impunity—treated, that is, with contempt. So too, as we have seen, the burial sacrament—indispensable passport as it is to the spiritual regions—is considered essential to release the human soul that has been temporarily degraded to the level of the animal, in order to elevate it to its legitimate position of spiritual pre-eminence. It is in fact in this, to a European, senseless and degrading ceremony, that the key is to be found which unlocks the whole doctrine of transmigration. What is more, it confirms in every sense the truth that the mere animal, or other embodiment, is in every emblematic instance but the material covering of some human spirit.

The fact of a creeper called *piridigi*, which is common to the Delta or West African forests, being venerated as an emblem because of its resemblance to the python, has already been alluded to, the offence of injuring it being referred to as “*irite nyanabo*,” *i.e.* missed the master, or the king of



snakes. On these occasions the punishment is invariably in the nature of a fine, accompanied by a ceremony of absolution, partaking of a sacrifice and offering to the offended deities.

It is unmistakably to fear, primarily of the animal, but subsequently, and in a much more pronounced sense, of the abiding ancestral spirit, that the germ of animal emblemism can be traced. For natural man saw and felt a power not only in the elements of Nature, but in the animal world around him, which, as forming part of his own personal environment, was altogether unavoidable; and he had taught himself to believe that this mysterious and omniscient power, whether it made itself felt in the lightning, in the water, or in the serpent, was derived entirely from the vitality and force of spirits who at one time had been human like himself; and he learned to fear it all the more as being a power that, because of the divinity of its descent and its connection with the Supreme, was infinitely greater, and more of a mystery than it would otherwise have been. For of course to him animals had a lower but inferior power of their own, while as regards this question of divine descent, it must be remembered that even disembodiment implied a pre-existing state of embodiment, so that disembodied spirits, whom he looked on as entirely evil, had once, according to his own belief, lived as human beings in possession of human bodies. In other words, that in spite of existing disembodiment they were primarily and essentially human spirits, who in losing their dualism had lost their humanity.

Nowhere is the unseen power which we have been speaking of felt so much as in the antipathy, amounting to repulsion and even dread, that is, as a general rule, entertained for snakes, a feeling which is not confined to the human element, but that extends to the animal. No more practical illustration of the assertion that it is to the instinct of fear that one of the primary sources of religion is to be traced, and no better or more convincing example of the intensity and sincerity of natural man's religion can be adduced than the faith which is to be seen both in India and Southern Nigeria, which forbids its devotees from killing the snake that has bitten or crushed a man to death. Here is to be found not only the origin of

the ancestral cult, but the germ of that naturalism from which all religion has proceeded, a process or channel that has since radiated into the numerous creeds which are now in existence.

For the fear of killing the snake is in no sense attached to a dread of the reptile itself, or to the reptilian soul (which, once it is killed, cannot kill again), but to the fact that the snake is not only symbolical of the ancestral deities, but that it actually carries within its body one of the spirits whose legions are beyond all computation. So that the offence committed is an outrage against the divine ancestors, in anticipation of whose retribution—in other words, retributive react for the act of commission—fear is at once generated. What in their eyes makes the matter worse and the fear greater is the fact that it has to be looked at from the standpoint of vengeance, which implies either an uninterrupted course of vindictive action on the part of the ancestral deities or death with disembodiment. For where the emblem chosen has been a venomous or treacherous reptile, such as a snake or a crocodile, *e.g.* it is reasonable to trace the selection back to some ancestor who was especially vindictive and crafty in his nature, therefore all the more to be hated and feared.

One important feature, which may have escaped the notice of the reader, must here be pointed out. This is the fact that on the death of a snake, or other ancestral emblem, it is purely for reasons of dogma that the priests do not allow the matter to be spoken of as one of killing, and further, that they do not admit the death of the indwelling ancestral spirit. For, as we have seen in Section IV. Ch. iv. (*b*), a death of this nature is entirely a question of mutual affinities, so that if the animal dies the human spirit inside it dies also. On the same principle, therefore, the doom of the man who designedly, or even accidentally, kills an ancestral emblem (for these natives, with regard to the effect produced, do not discriminate between design and accident), or who when that emblem is a tree lops off even a single twig, is death, and eventually disembodiment.

So it is that out of deference to this inevitable judgment of a relentless and inexorable Karma, the Hindu and Delta natives—those to whom the snake is symbolical—avoid killing snakes. It is quite evident, therefore, that an attitude such as

this of combined respect and fear for a reptile or animal on account of its ancestral emblemism must have originated, as we saw in Section V., in the first and exceedingly remote instance, from the fear of the animal, and then from the fear inspired by the ancestor in a double sense; first of all, in his own person, and subsequently in the spirit. For having within him the divine or spiritual power of reproducing his own species, and of living again in his own offspring, both in the flesh, and from time to time in the spirit, as well as of having possessed the power of life and death, which the offices of patriarch and spirit father had each conferred on him, it was only natural that a dual feeling of fear and veneration for him should have evolved, first of all, from personal association, and then from spiritual control. Going still farther, down to the very root of this dual association, it is (as we have already seen in Sections I. and II.) easy to trace it to those instincts of fear and veneration which in the lower or animal stage had only lain dormant because of the defect of that further and higher development which, when it did evolve, inspired them with that power of intelligence and expression which at once raised the animal into a conscious and reasoning being.

The deeper I have gone the more conclusive has it appeared to me that the entire question of animal emblemism is ancestral, the connection that existed between the animal and the human phases being utilised and converted into an association of convenience, to suit human needs and exigencies.

## CHAPTER VII

### EMBODIMENT IN NATURAL ELEMENTS AND PHENOMENA

It now remains for us to examine briefly the attitude of these natives towards those features of Nature that we regard as either elements or phenomena. Looking at this question from their standpoint there are but two divisions in Nature as it appears to them: (1) The ordinary elements of earth, water, fire, and air, which as being in actual contact with them are distinctive and integral units of their own personal environment. (2) The ordinary and visible phenomena, which, however, are subdivided as follows: first, into those such as lightning, thunder, rain, wind, etc., which, although out of their own reach, have the ability to make their power felt to some purpose and effect, which, in their language, can strike to injure or to kill in the form of drought, as well as of fire; and, secondly, those like the sky, the sun, the moon, and the stars, which are so far removed as to be seen and even felt, but without injury or danger—on the contrary, with more or less advantage to themselves.

In nothing is this classification seen so clearly as in the differentiation of their attitude towards these various natural objects. The elements of earth, fire, and water, with which their associations are not merely personal, but proprietary, are in evidence in every part of the Delta, irrespective of tribe or locality, as symbols of especial reverential and universal adoration.

Next in importance to these from a symbolical aspect are those which, while more to be feared than the contagious elements, on account of the unexpected suddenness of their

actions, are less dreaded because of the distance, infrequency, and inconstancy of their associations, and which in consequence are by no means either so universally or so respectfully venerated. For while earth, water, fire, and air are ever with them in their everyday lives, even in their homes and households, thunder, lightning, rain, and wind are only perceptible at intervals, and then not always as a baneful influence.

The most distant phenomena of all, except in very rare and specific cases, are entirely ignored. Indeed, during my long and varied experience of these natives the only exception to this rule was that of the Ibo clan, to the north of Nkwerri, whose name for the Supreme Being was Egwe, the Sky, a name which synchronises with their conception of the original fatherhood, in the same sense that the earth is recognised as the first and great mother. Yet the fact remains that in many of the Ju-Ju houses in the Ibo interior I myself saw rude clay images, purporting to be emblems of the sun, moon, rainbow, and stars. This in itself is evidence of the existence among these people of a worship or adoration of the phenomena, as well as of the Phallic principle, but with regard to the former more particularly, it is not an adoration that is prominent. Like all their worship of natural objects, it is more specific than general.

More than once in these pages it has been pointed out with regard to animals, and more particularly objects, that it is neither the size nor yet the appearance which impresses these natives. The material insignificance of embodiments is of no significance to them, because the embodiments of themselves are incapable of either effort or result, and they judge a matter entirely by the consequences which are to be expected. The cause, too, is a matter of indifference as compared with the effect it can produce, which must be considered and checkmated, for with them the cause, as a rule, is not very far to seek. It is the spirit power which is inside the object that carries all the weight and all the significance. So a harmless pill or potion may in ever so small a compass conceal a power that in a few short hours is able to strike the strongest man a mortal blow. In exactly the same sense it is in the proximity of the object to the person which, in their eyes, constitutes all



the greater danger, in spite of the fact that, according to their belief, distance is no obstacle to the enchantment of that power which lies outside the natural, but if in any sense an impediment it is certainly a more mysterious and dangerous one than in the case of the ordinary natural operations. It is this seeming disconnection which can be bridged over by a power that can effect its purpose without either association or connection, which, as the all potent element of witchcraft, is in consequence the most dreaded of any. In this sense, therefore, *i.e.* in the inscrutable mystery which envelops a power so far-reaching yet so deadly, the outside powers are more to be feared than the natural. For with regard to the latter, in spite of the distance that separates the operator from his victims, there is in their estimation a distinct connection between them; as, *e.g.*, when lightning strikes a man or a tree, an act which, even in its relation to the latter object, is purely spiritual, *i.e.* the act of the lightning spirit towards the spirit in the tree; or when the wind disturbs the waters, so as to upset the canoe and cause loss of life; or yet again, when rain is responsible for the inundation that submerges a homestead with some of its inmates. It is in this unmistakable evidence of contact that the real differentiation between the natural and the extra-natural is to be traced. This, in fact, is the line of demarcation which divides the natural or personal from the unnatural or impersonal, in other words, all those units of nature which are connected by personal association with the ancestral spirits of humanity on the one hand, and all those units that lie outside and beyond this natural state of spiritualised embodiment, on the other.

But even this potential factor, which despises the insuperable obstacle of distance, cannot in reality do without association of some sort, so at least their own experience teaches us. For it is not only obliged to employ human agents, but actually utilises certain persons in every household in the Delta—a fact which exactly doubles the intensity of its potentialities, because it is this combination of outside and inside forces, this connection of the impersonal with the personal, which is as irresistible as it is inexorable. For within the restricted limits of their philosophy it is seemingly

impossible to operate in the direction of either reproduction or dissolution without the utilisation of those factors which either connect and associate, or, *vice versa*, disconnect and dissociate the spiritual and the material.

It has already been pointed out that every matter which lies beyond the range of native comprehension at once becomes a mystery. It is not surprising, therefore, that these people live in an atmosphere which is thick and impenetrable with mysticism, so that the very atmosphere itself has grown into a mystery ; so much so, in fact, that the ordinary air they breathe, and even the flitting shadows, have been spiritualised and made intelligent at the same time that they are materialised and tangible. It is only to be expected that to them the occult is not merely a region of shadows and illusions, but a world of substance, of matter, and of realities, each one of which is a separate conundrum in itself. In this irrational and emotional manner it is that the incomprehensible and the mystical go hand in hand, so that the greater the incomprehensibility the greater of course the mystery, and as such more a matter for silent and reverential awe than one for active speculation and hypothesis. Not that these natural philosophers are devoid of intelligence and the power of speculation. For, as before remarked, they are still observant, curious, and imitative, so that conjecture cannot be altogether wanting, but keeping their thoughts to themselves, and looking on inquisitiveness as bad form, they are practically silent, especially where the European, whose ridicule they fear, is concerned, so that their philosophy is absolutely lost in the humid air of their tropical environment. Yet no matter how great the mystery, it is of much less significance to these timorous creatures, of little or no consequence, in fact, if in their experience it is too far removed to work them mischief. For although the measurement of time and distance is merely a vague and limited conception, which altogether lies within the realm of the known in arriving at certain conclusions, they very naturally do so by their own limited standard, which is entirely one of associations, a something definite, which to them is comprehensible, by connecting together actual persons, events, and places with their own personal experiences of them.

So that in weighing up the value or significance of a mystery, that is, when they have first of all satisfied themselves regarding its possession by a spirit, these practical yet ignorant people do so, as a rule, from only two directions: (1) its attitude and proximity towards themselves; (2) the range, compass, and capacity of its powers. In a few words, then, the nearer and more personal the contiguity or association, the greater is the suspicion and the fear inspired against the object. So that it is quite possible for the merest trifle of matter—a tiny feather, *e.g.*, which can be blown away as easily as an air bubble,—if spiritualised, to inspire greater fear among them than the deep-toned thunder, the raging tornado of wind, and the fiery lightning. In consequence of this, the counter-move, or compromise of sacrifice, is essential in exactly the same increasing and comparative ratio. For it is in sacrifice that the true efficacy of propitiation lies, and the more substantial this is with regard both to the quality and the quantity of the flesh offered, the greater is its spiritual potentiality. Needless to remark, therefore, that when there is no need for propitiation in any given direction, the evidence is entirely in favour of the assumption that the spirits, on that side at least, are temporarily favourable. Nowhere, for instance, is this idea seen to such perfection that is worked out in actual practice, as we have seen it in their use of medicines—*vide* Chapter v., Section V.—which are carried on the person and kept in every household, in order to prevent those more immediate dangers that persons are exposed to, which vary with their calling or occupations, or in the event of failure in this direction, to preserve or restore them. Indeed, the universal adoration which is given to these medicines is the most practical, as it is the most incontestable, proof of the virtue and significance in which they are held; and the same remarks apply with equal force in regard to the natural elements and phenomena. So that it is only possible to value the significance of the veneration in which these are esteemed by comparing them with the emblemism which prevails. For as practice is irrefutable evidence of the existence of belief, emblemism is the tangible expression of existing practice. And as I have more than once pointed out with regard to these

natives, emblems are not venerated unless they have an indwelling spirit who sanctifies them, and to whom the adoration is addressed. So that if it is true that the proof of a pudding is in the eating, it is still more true of emblemism, that it is direct evidence relative to the adoration of certain spirits.

But as enough has been said on this matter to make it thoroughly intelligible and explicit to the reader, we will pass on to a closer and more detailed examination.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE EARTH : THE SPIRIT AND ADORATION OF IT

COMMENCING first of all with the earth, it is quite evident that in every single household or community in the Delta, be the tribe what it may, this familiar element inspires in these people a feeling that is almost indescribable from the European standpoint. Because it is not merely a feeling of reverence, combined with a deep sense of their own exclusively personal and proprietary right, for this applies also to water, for which they have not the same affection or regard ; nor is it merely that feeling which makes the non-alienation of land an impossibility. It is an inherited tendency, in which all the emotion and reason that they are capable of has joined issue, in the firm conviction that while on the one hand they receive their spiritual existence direct from the Sky-God, or Spirit-Father, the human or material part of them is of the earth, earthy. In this way they regard her as the great mother god, whose first conception by the great He, or Fertiliser, who came down from above, made her conceive and produce all those natural forms that are still in evidence all round them ; and the continuity of whose existence is dependent on the continuance of spiritual animation or reconception, which means that, according to them, reproduction is a dual process of association between two energies, the higher spiritual and the lower material.

Traced to its source, it is not surprising that they place the spiritual before the human, as the higher and the more essential energy, because to them it is the animating, or, so to speak, life- and intelligence-giving principle. Here, then, we have the true explanation of the superiority of man, or the



fertilising energy over woman as the conceiving energy. From this idea we get the master and owner, on the one hand, and the bearer or producer, and later slave or property, on the other. This idea, subsequent, as it was of course, to the original reason of physical considerations, easily explains the subservience of the female position, even under religions such as Mohammedanism and Christianity. Yet, strange to say, although in the opinion of the natural forbear of these people, the sky, or the Supreme Being who lived there, was, as the distant and inaccessible animator and life-giver of all nature, the highest and supremest of all beings, he first of all looked downward to the earth, as to the first great mother of his kind and of all the things which dwelt thereon and were contained therein; and it was not until sometime afterwards, when his intelligence had expanded, and observation, combined with curiosity, had excited speculation, that he began to look upwards for an explanation of the life mystery. Looked at from his own restricted aspect, everything he possessed outside his own person, everything which preserved and prolonged his own precious existence—shelter, food, and drink—were all products of that earth on which he lived. So that it required no great stretch of imagination on his part for him to surmise and believe that even his own person belonged to her. And just as he saw plants, and trees, and hills, and stones growing out of the earth, so he conceived of his own kind and of animals that they had also at some former period proceeded from the same great source. But how? was a question which puzzled, and is still puzzling many generations of natural people, as it has mystified all the great thinkers of modern civilisation. For natural man had neither precedent nor association by which he could bridge over the hiatus that existed between his own and the animal species—who reproduced themselves—and the vegetal and material creation which was reproduced by the earth, so that it is in no sense surprising that he was at a loss how to arrive at a satisfactory explanation of the mystery. Yet, this unbridgable gap, that eventually led him to place the human and the animal species above the rest of creation, was but another step upward in the ladder of speculation.

It may be, it is at least possible, that seeing, as natural man so often did, the reflection of his own image on the sun-burnished mirror of some sheet of water—that appeared to him, as it were, to lie between the earth that he was on and the sky which hung above him—made him ponder and reflect. For in addition to his own image he saw the sky reflected, and when he looked upwards and saw the actual thing itself, “eye to sky,” as he himself would express it, it occurred to him that there was little or no difference between the reality and the reflection. It is more than probable, in fact, that the latter to him was as much a reality as the former. This was not all, however. For having looked downward and then upward, he discovered in time a distinct connection—which afterwards developed into a close and personal association—not only between the two skies, as they appeared to him, but also between the sky and the earth. Because in the real sky he saw the substance, and in the reflection the shadow, in other words, the spirit; a picture which, the more often he looked at it, grew through his most sentient perceptions, out of much unconscious thought, followed by conscious speculation into a real experience first of all, and then into a firm conviction that rooted itself in his inmost consciousness. Indeed, taking the egotistic nature of the man into consideration, it is possible to conjecture that the reflection of his own image, along with the sky-soul, ended, after intense concentration regarding the shape or form of the Sky Being, in a phantasmal conception of him in his own human image. Or yet again, possibly it may be that, led by the reflection, he cast his eyes upwards and saw through the darkening shadows of approaching night a phantasmal picture of his first great Father in the descending gloom, which appeared to him as the shadow or soul of the sky.

And when we consider that to these excessively natural people a shadow and a picture are one and the same thing, presenting, as they do, a similar perception and idea, it is all the more easy to trace the connection of this idea right through from beginning to end. Further, when we find that in this word, *Onyinyo*, which stands both for shadow and picture, there is a distinct affinity between it and *Thinye*.

which means a thing or property, and that Ihinye implies equally mystery or wisdom, it enables us to trace the association of ideas that in the mind of natural man led up to the formation of the Creator merely from the contemplation of a shadow picture of the sky-soul. When we take into consideration the dense ignorance and the egregious vanity of these and all natural people, it is not in the least surprising that human comprehension was altogether unable to soar above the conception of a divine image that was in every respect a likeness of its own form. Because, apart from the very reasonable and rational consideration that any phase of Nature which is higher in its moral or intellectual scope than the human we know, but do not thoroughly comprehend, is a phase that is absolutely unintelligible, because it is unknown and unknowable, it is all the more surprising when we analyse the spiritual, *i.e.* the highest conception it has attained to, to find that it is based on the bare evidence of a mere mental phantasm, which has emanated or been thrown out of his thoughts by an excess of concentration on a subject that was in every sense a personal desire or interest—when, in fact, we discover that the spiritual is simply a detachment from a shadow picture of the human substance or reality. For at the period we speak of human intelligence was still undeveloped and practically under the sway of the emotions; but as the gift of speech and the use of hands were faculties that were confined to the two-legged and talking animal, the knowledge of this experience undoubtedly accentuated his egoism to such a considerable extent that it eventually culminated in the creation by himself—or rather in a personal evolution—of the Creator, from whom he afterwards traced his own descent—a divine egoism which, in a word, was merely the result of mental obliquity.

The present attitude of these Delta natives, except that it lacks the philosophical data in support of its beliefs, is exactly as it has been here described. Indeed, gathered, as these experiences have been, simply and solely from the customs, practices, fables, and conversations of the more intelligent minority, it is feasible to follow, step by step, as I have endeavoured to do in these pages, the entire religious conception, as it originated in the dream and shadow soul, and ends

at least as a temporary measure in the spiritual preserves. For with regard to these natural elements or phenomena, emblemism is peculiarly significant, insomuch that the emblem—idol of clay, or wood, or natural object, as it may be—is not by any means either invariably or necessarily inspired by, although it is representative of, the specific deity; but it may be inspired by one of the countless spirit myrmidons who are at his beck and call, and who co-operate with him in his natural operations. Indeed, according to popular belief, the deities in question, without in any sense interfering with their own especial operations, are in a position to detach numerous spirits in various directions in connection with all outlying functions that appertain to their own specific department. In other words, they are but heads of certain departments, just as the patriarchs in the flesh are heads of their own households, which association undoubtedly inspired the spiritual conception.

In this personal and connected sense the wind god of these people is said to control the winds and breezes that are at his command; the tornado deity, the combined storm forces of lightning, thunder, wind, and rain; the sun god, the light and other various fire elements, and so on. In the same literal and natural way do they trace a connection between the sun, or light-giver, and the fire which burns on their hearths, and which they find in trees and stones—the fire which to them at once becomes a sun spirit, connected with the lightning which strikes the tree as well as the stone.

Thus it is that Anwuru—smoke—is, as it has been for ages, the sun-burning, or, as it is in another Ibo dialect, Awunroku, or sun-fire, and so, for exactly the same reason, to his modern successors a European rocket is Oku-mo, or fire spirit. On the same lines, there is little or no practical difference between the wind, the breath of the nostrils, and the spirit essence that animates all Nature, while Ofufu, destruction, is undoubtedly derived from the same root as Ufufe, wind, on the principle that it is a destructive agent. Hence, again, that connection which explains the kinship of man to the animal, and the animal to the vegetal, as being one with the animating principle that proceeds from the Generator or Supreme Creator. It is



possible to connect this term, which in their tongues represents wind and breath, and which is affiliated with the spirit, to the actual sky, and in this way to the sky-soul or Creator himself. The whole question, looked at in a natural, therefore limited sense, resolves itself into one of attachment and relativeness.

In this rational way only is it possible to trace the meaning of the Ibo term *Igwi-kala*, or he who came down from above, as the sky god, or maker and owner of the entire world, that is, all of it which is visible to the eye of natural man. For the fact that the sky was ever present, by night as well as by day, embracing all other phenomena, including his own mother earth, which in comparison was puny and insignificant, most assuredly gave him the idea of its omnipresence and omnipotence, which resulted in the absolute and unapproachable supremacy of the infinite.

Whatever their ancestors may have thought with regard to the attitude of the supreme god in relation to themselves, it is quite certain that his relegation to a position of beneficent passivity has not been the result of any modern innovation or reform. This, like every item of their religion, has been handed down to them through countless ages. For just as their ancestors found it unnecessary to propitiate the Creator—except once annually, and in crises or emergencies, when all other mediators had failed,—and the worship of the lesser sun, moon, and star deities appeared to them a mere waste of the substance and spirit of sacrifice, so the natives of the present day ignored them, and have also left them to their fate as harmless and beneficent operators, of whom they have no dread.

But in spite of natural man's patriarchal ideas, and his regard of the female energy as the lesser, that innate feeling of awe and reverence which the incomprehensible always excites in an impulsive, emotional temperament, produced in him a veneration for the earth that, as we have seen from a European aspect, is indefinable, and which to this day is, as it were, a religion in itself. Yet a comparative and inductive analysis of the cult as it once existed, and as it now exists, leads us to the conclusion that not so much the ideal, or the ardour, as the original significance and practice of this cult



has most certainly fallen into abeyance. For it is not exactly to the earth as one gigantic emblem, and yet again not entirely to the vast spirit which animates her that these natives offer adoration, but to the household gods; in other words, to the deified ancestral spirits whose human embodiments have long since returned into her ample bowels. Indeed, as far as she, the mother of these gods, is concerned, their adoration, although sincere and reverential, is silent and unexpressed. Not, however, because their belief in the mother god has diminished, but because, as in the case of the father god, the necessity for propitiation has ceased to exist on account of her general goodness and beneficence, her inexhaustible and luxuriant fertility, and because other departmental and domestic deities, such, *e.g.*, as the crop or agriculture supervisor, the superintendent of hunting and fishing, the forest and water agents, receive as myrmidons and mediums a meed of the adoration that in olden times was no doubt made to her direct.

It is in this inscrutable, therefore spiritual, and all the more mysterious, fecundity, which to them is the acme, and still more the practical personification of the true beauty and motive of existence, that while it inspires them with a reverence for the universal mother, enables them to recognise in the maternity of women all that is most beautiful in them. Yet, as we have seen, while giving them credit for their share of the transaction, and while respecting them, as they do the greater mother, for the fruits of their labours, they only do so in a secondary sense, as being the result of a higher and seminal co-operation, a principle which at bottom is most undoubtedly responsible for the present undignified position that even civilised women still occupy.

Thus it is that while the passive goodness of the father is annually acknowledged by a special ceremony and feast, and his favour invoked for the year to come, the more active and prolific beneficence of the mother is only indirectly recognised in two yearly formulas that are made to the crop god—the first a harvest festival of thanksgiving for the new crops, *i.e.* the supply received; and the second a similar ceremony at the close of the year, as an invocation of blessing and

prosperity on the crops about to be planted, *i.e.* the supply expected. For in no rational sense do these natives recognise their own manual efforts, but they believe themselves to be merely agents at the mercy of the agricultural spirits; and as the commissariat or supply branch is one with agriculture, and the meteorological aspect of the question is also under spiritual control, their position is one of constant jeopardy, that all the year round at various intervals necessitates the preventive and infallible remedy of sacrifice.

Yet at Nsugbe—a farming district in the interior behind Onitsha—the earth herself, as I found, is not only held in great veneration, but worshipped prior to the second of the festivals above alluded to; this custom, however, is practically confined to agricultural districts. But if no greater or more special offerings are made to the goddess, the veneration—apart from the personal feeling of inseparable attachment—which these people have for the earth, is demonstrated daily, almost hourly, in many smaller ways, *e.g.* by formulas which, interpreted in a literal sense, are seemingly trivial in themselves, but the spirit of which involves a hidden meaning and a deeper significance than is associated with the mainspring of their religion.

So it is that in connection with their various ancestral emblems which are to be found in every household, town, or community in the Delta, it is usual either before eating or drinking to place on the ground, or, as the Ibani do, to throw in the air a small portion of food and water, and as this is being done a petition in the following or similar words is addressed to the manes on behalf of their descendants, “Eat, drink, and live, O ——,” here the name or names of the departed spirits are mentioned, “for the welfare and prosperity of thy children and household, and be pleased to protect them from all malign influences, and prevent them from falling on any of its members.”

This offering, which is the practical rendering of the Christian grace before and after meals (unquestionably an evolution from the more ancient custom), is also addressed in practically the same strain, but of course in the specific directions of friendship or patronage, either by men to the

shades of their most intimate friends, or by slaves towards their late masters.

In addition to this, however, in every community throughout the Delta, but especially among the interior tribes, food offerings and libations are also offered to the divinities who, under different names, are worshipped as the town protector or preserver—and who as it happens are in some instances goddesses—an adoration which in the same sense most undoubtedly applies to and includes the great mother. This custom, as I have seen it in hundreds of Ibo and other towns, is performed religiously and without shrinking, even in the presence of white strangers, particularly with regard to the presentation of the kola nut and palm wine, as a mark of welcome and friendship on all special occasions, in addition to the regular routine, as a tribute of reverence and gratitude to the town protector—who by the way in many instances combines with preservation the rôle of diviner—for protecting them from all harm. What is more, no meal is ever eaten and no liquid is ever drunk until this act of grace has been fulfilled. In the same way, no native of Southern Nigeria will leave his household premises to go merely outside his own confines, even amongst the people of his own community, without a practical appeal to the household medicine or protective spirit, which consists of dipping the hand into the bitter water and rubbing it on the body—an appeal that, in the event of a contemplated journey, or equally on the return from one, assumes the importance of a sacrificial offering, which is invariably a goat. This is done to obtain the propitiation of the bush or water genii through ancestral mediation, and in the latter instance it is a thanksgiving for a safe return. When the family is poor the offering generally takes the form of a few eggs or plantains and palm nuts placed at the shrine, and possibly a bottle of spirits to the local priest or diviner. Ordinarily speaking, the dangers of a journey by land or water are more or less even, except when existing conditions are reversed, as, *e.g.*, when an interior native is obliged to travel in a canoe on rough and big water near the sea; or if the coaster has to make a walk through the bush at some distance from his town. In either case, however, the idea and

the result expected are the same, and the act of propitiation is merely a natural form of insurance against all risks; for, as we have seen, there is in their estimation no such thing as accident. And just as among some of the tribes—the Efik and Ibibio, *e.g.*—a tortoise-shell or an elephant's tusk may constitute an Imbiam or sacred emblem, upon which the insurance can be effected, so among the Oru or Ijo an empty gin bottle or the tooth of a hippopotamus embodies a symbol of intrinsic significance to them, forming a reminder, a bond, or an honourable pledge. It is regarded, in fact, as a compact, with the head of the house or priest as witness, between their ancestors and themselves on the one side, and the aggressive spirits on the other, that they should not be molested.

Finally, as an excellent because thoroughly practical illustration of what this feeling of earth veneration means for them, it is usual, when two communities are going to war with each other, for the people belonging to them to take an oath of allegiance to the land and to the persons of their fathers to fight valiantly for the common cause. This is done in the following manner. Collecting together before the emblem of the earth—Ani, as the Ibo call it—under their leaders, and the Odogu or war captain, all the members of the community, including the women, take a small piece of the earth of the emblem and mix it either with water or tombo, which, administered to them by the Okpara or priests, they are then and there obliged to drink as evidence that they are of *one mind*. This custom is identical in principle with that which enforces the drinking of the blood of a legitimate victim, or captive taken in war, and is connected also with the ceremony of blood brotherhood; for there is a bond of association in the blood of the human being with the person of the being himself, as he in turn is connected with the earth, and the earth again with the spirit of the great generator. This *oneness of mind* is nothing after all but a unity, not so much of purpose and of the common interests, as a oneness of the animating spirit, which, as having in their belief been generated and imparted by the creator to the ancestral spirit fathers, is a purely family matter, from which there can be no legitimate

dissent or detachment; because outside this ancestral oneness all is unnatural and uneven.

It is not possible, however, to conclude this chapter without one more reference to the allegory quoted in Chapter iv. of Part II., in which an Ibo chief impresses upon his visitor that it is not *the land* that is responsible for the wickedness of a country, but *the people* in it, who, animated and encouraged by various antipathetic spirits, work in such a way as to disturb the harmony that would otherwise prevail. For it is evident that in the philosophy which is here enunciated, there is indicated a natural reverence for the earth as the first great mother and producer of all that is in "being," but especially of food, and all which nourishes and makes for increase; therefore, as that of a bountiful and gracious goddess, who was selected as such by the first great father to be his co-partner or co-operator.



## CHAPTER IX

### WATER: THE SPIRITS OF THE SEA OR ESTUARIES

ALTHOUGH water is also venerated, it is in every respect a veneration not of confidence but of fear of the unknown, so that essentially it is a distinctly inferior form of veneration to that offered to the earth, which is venerated with gratitude as a protector, preserver, and provider of food, and also of water. For the benefit of this very needful quencher of thirst, washer down of food, and cleanser of the body is looked on as more in the light of an earth product, whose source, though spiritual, is yet a mystery to them, and in no sense the work of the water spirits, in spite of the fact that it comes within the scope of their department—whose head is the spirit principle of water—if aggravated or injured by human actions, to stop the supply: a matter that was alluded to in Chapter IV., Section IV.

It is not so much the water itself that is feared as the spirits of various kinds, usually in the forms of animals, of the fish and reptile class more particularly, who are believed to live in water, and who are responsible for any malicious activity that it displays, and who as a class are put down to be evil and inimical. This latter phase—curiously enough, as it may appear to the European—applies more especially to the spirits of fresh water than to those of the sea. For among all the coast tribes who live in touch with the Atlantic, or the rough water of the open estuaries, not only are certain good spirits to be found, but, with the exception of the Creator, some at least of their tutelary deities are connected with or of the sea.

So if we examine their traditions, but above all their

emblemism, we find that although some of these are to do with water, others again are connected with and of the land. Yet both again are so unmistakably associated with or related to each other, that it is quite possible to explain this otherwise inscrutable affinity through the spiritual connection or oneness which in their minds exists between the two great elements. In other words, that the divinities in question are of ancestral origin. So that after all there is nothing curious in the dualism of their character, as contrasted with the one-sided inimicality of the purely fresh-water spirits.

This is entirely in agreement with the fact that one and all of these tribes—Jekri, Ijo, Oru, Brass, New Calabar, Ibani, Andoni, and Efik—came originally from the interior.

Thus, for example, some years ago—prior to the introduction of Christianity—among the Ibani the following were, as they still are to the Opobo section, the principal gods of the community, viz.:—

Adum, the father of all gods, but not of the creator Tamuno, who is of the water, and espoused to Okoba, the principal goddess, and mother of Eberebo, all three being symbolised by wooden figures of a man, a woman, and a boy, the latter a very intelligent, subtle, and brave deity, whom children were and are dedicated to and named after, the act conferring on them the precious inheritance of his good qualities in general, and of his courage in particular.

Simingi, literally the bad water, recognised as an evil or inimical deity, inasmuch as he is only and purely a sacrificial god, *i.e.* a god whom it is essential to propitiate by sacrifice, to avert the wrath and destruction which he is capable of exerting.

Numkpo, like Okoba and Eberebo, is a land god, whose emblem is a snake, which is forbidden to be killed, and formerly in Bonny was considered most sacred by the Alison household; a fact that may possibly explain the association which has existed between the Ibani and Brass, although of course it points equally to a connection with the nearer Ijo tribes, or the more distant Ibo of the interior.

Ekulowi, a goddess with her own priestesses, upon whose emblem of wood it is the custom to swear all men who

bring charges or accusations against women—in a word, the champion and protectress of female interests.

Lastly, Oluburu, a god about whom I could get no information beyond the fact that he had been derived from the Andoni, and evidently an introduction, presumably through intermarriage, which has been forgotten. Besides these there are, of course, the deities belonging to and representing the interests of every household, as being not merely peculiar but personal to it, its own hereditary and exclusively private property—spiritual heirlooms, in a word—just as, and because in fact, the household is related to and possessed by the deities in question. Similar to if not identical with the Aryan Pitris and Vastosh Pati, these ancestral spirits of the Delta are but a lesser and more recent edition of the greater—yet not exactly more important and certainly less personal—gods belonging to the community, who, at some remote period, had occupied the same position of domestic guardians, prior to the expansion of the community, and when it was but a household itself.

It is advisable for the reader to master this very distinct and lucid idea of association and connection between the gods of the household and those of the community. For as he reads on he will see that, irrespective of tribe or locality, this personal or ancestral relationship is the governing principle; and that the paternal, maternal, and filial deities, in addition to certain deified departmental heads, varying with and dependent on local conditions, are common to all. Among the coast tribes the veneration in which the paternal god is held expresses itself most expansively in the reverence which is offered to the spirits of the sea and rivers, whose number is legion. This is best seen in the numberless shrines, or toy Ju-Ju houses, that exist on the banks of the streams and creeks innumerable of the entire Delta, and which are usually placed in the most conspicuous positions in the vicinity of towns, farms, habitations, landing-places, and at dangerous corners or angles where tidal influences are more felt, or cross currents are experienced, or where fatal accidents have occurred and lives have been lost. Built of palm branches in a rectangular form, these miniature temples are open at the sides, but in the

middle of them a fathom of cloth, generally white, though sometimes red, is hung in the form of a curtain, behind which is a small wooden figure, that is supposed to represent some particular water spirit, and also some plates, manillas, and bottles. Fruit and also meat offerings are often made to them, especially on the part of those whose intention it is to make a journey by water, or who have just returned from one; the former being a sacrifice of propitiation, and the latter a thanksgiving service for a safe and sound return. Some of these shrines, however, are specially erected, more particularly by the Kula people—a small fishing community of mixed origin, Oru presumably—in honour of Adumu, the mother of all water deities, who has a yearly festival all to herself.

Very suggestive, with regard to these spiritual water babies, is the play or celebration of Owu, which in Brass—as it is among all the other coast tribes—is the representation of certain specific spirits who are familiar, and belong only to their own people and localities. These Owu, who are of course very numerous, are believed to come up the river out of the depths of the sea, either to sport or rest themselves on land. So these doll's houses have been constructed to enable them to carry out their intentions. So too, by anticipating the wants of the spirits, they fulfil equally the purpose of their devotees in currying—say rather in palm-oiling and peppering—the favour that is so indispensable to their well-being and existence, as places in which nourishment is provided, as well as shelter.

So likewise in the plays which have just been referred to—that are, by the way, said to have neither religious significance nor any kind of connection with the ritual of their faith—it is possible to find traces of the same spirit of adulation and of subservience to an idea, the same fear of consequences, that must of necessity be put off, from month to month and from year to year. More than this, it is the application of this principle in a popular form of exposition—a form, in fact, by which the government of these people has been at least supported, if not maintained, in a way that mingles and distributes punishment with pleasure, affording as it does pain to some few ne'er-do-weels and recalcitrants, and



amusement to the majority of the well-behaved and law-abiding. Further, it is an experience which enables the observer to see in these festal but instructive exhibitions a decided religious formula, that, if it has lost its original significance, retains at least a certain flavour of that moral correction which is so distinct a feature of their social administration, that most unquestionably betrays its ancestral origin.

It is worth while to examine these Owu plays, for there are certain characteristics associated with them which, from the standpoint of naturism, are unquestionably significant. First of all, then, each Owu has its own way of celebrating its own play, which is an expression of independence. Next, it is noticeable that while some of these water spirits are dangerous, carrying as they do whips and swords, the former of which are freely used by the impersonator of the spirit, whose privilege this is, others are practically harmless and inoffensive, dancing and singing being their only motive; a tolerably significant interpretation, as in the previous instance, of self-will and interest, of the character and personality of the spirit, *i.e.* of the household, or community, to whom it belongs.

Another circumstance, in spite of its seeming triviality, is deserving of record. This is the fact that although the majority of the spirits are said, as we saw in the previous section, to possess females rather than males, and presumably to belong, or rather to attach themselves to that sex, in the plays they are only impersonated by men. This is explainable by the contempt, on the part of natural man, for everything which he considers inferior to himself, yet belonging to him as lord or owner of the soil, including the weaker sex, which, in his opinion, has been distinguished by the creative agency, with an infinitely greater scope for intrigue and deception. So the men have associated women with these spirits of the ever changeable and unstable element. For in their eyes there is in water, in its various moods and aspects, but especially in that dubious and suspicious calm which betokens the storm, a spirit element seething with damnable deceit and cruel treachery, which lurks beneath the glossy surface, only awaiting the golden opportunity of snatching and



conveying its victim into the depths of darkness. A philosophical, if pessimistic, contemplation, which recalls those lines of Virgil—

Mene salis placidi vultum, fluctusque quietos.  
Ignorare jubes ? mene huic confidere monstro ?

that are so splendidly typical of the myriad-mooded sea: "Do you desire that I should distrust the appearance of the placid sea, and of the waves which are now quiet? Do you wish that I should confide in such a monster?" Or, as these natives would add, "Do you for a moment imagine that we are not on our guard against those attractive but deceitful appearances which are the sure and certain forerunners of danger, or perhaps destruction, that only await the opportunity to completely overwhelm us."

Lastly, there is the fact that while the man representing the Owu appears with a human mask on his face, he carries on his head the figure, rudely carved in wood and painted, of a fish, or some curious-looking reptile. A similar feature occurs in the plays that prevail among the interior people, the only difference in the head-gear being the substitution of land in place of water animals.

Selecting the Brass Owu as an excellent example of the water spirits of the other coast tribes, these are the names of a few of the most familiar, if not most important—Nyana-boperemo, Kondu, Sukuta, Adumuta, Akpana, Owu Ebi, Ebi-erewo, and last but by no means least, as far not only as his name, but fame, is concerned, Amgbagbayai.

The first mentioned of these, who is "the God," or literally, "Master of Wealth," belongs to Twon, a small town near the mouth of the Brass river. Of recent years, however, it appears that he has retired from active participation in the duties and responsibilities of his office, which he has handed over to his son Kondu. But in spite of this fact, it is still believed that during his régime he was in the habit of personating his spiritual entity, and of, as my informants put it, impersonating himself; a power of embodiment, it seems, that attaches to most of the principal Owu, which, from their own aspect, is in no sense wonderful, considering that a somewhat similar process of reincarnation is daily going on in their own persons. In

this way, Nyanaboperemo brought up wealth in the shape of goods to the house of the individual upon whom his favour had fallen. Appearing in the form of an ordinary man, he gave his protégé to understand, by means of some mysterious, presumably magnetic, process, which he was on no account to divulge, that he was thoroughly satisfied with him, subsequent to which communication everything undertaken by the latter became prosperous and turned into wealth. Sukuta, who is the wife of Kondu, is seemingly more a favourite with women than with men, who in addition to devoting their time and attention to her husband, also endeavour to secure the patronage of Amgbagbayai. This spirit, whose name is not merely a mouthful, but whose deeds and misdeeds are certainly proportional, is a personality of decidedly dual propensities, with strong personal likes and dislikes. What is more, he is essentially a middleman among these middlemen, and a trader to the backbone, trading, as he is popularly believed to do, in oil and other produce with the agents in charge of the European factories. Unlike the master or Kondu, however, Amgbagbayai the Duplex is a born diplomatist, therefore thorough in his duplicity, for on no account does he impersonate himself. On the contrary, when he is desirous of conferring his ghostly favours, which, by the way, are in substance, he assumes the form of the particular person, usually a chief,—for his proclivities, to say nothing of his lineage, are aristocratic,—provides himself with canoes and paddlers, and leaves the produce at the factory beaches. Everything this Owu does, in fact, is carried out in a perfectly workmanlike and systematic manner, down even to the question of receipts, which he obtains from the agents concerned, but which he takes good care are left in charge of the latter, so that his protégé may receive in full the credit of his transactions.

When Amgbagbayai is desirous of doing some one a bad turn, he at once impersonates him, and obtains large trusts from the agents, in his name and person, debts which involve him in difficulties that ultimately prove his ruin.

As far as the coast natives—the Jekri, Brass, New Calabar, Ibani, and Efik—are concerned, it is quite clear that all these spirits who are in any way connected with European trade

are of comparatively modern origin. But this fact, affecting as it does the external aspect of their religion, is, as we have seen, of no essential significance. On the contrary, it but emphasises the fact that emblemism is in every vital sense an adjunct to spiritualism. What, however, is of still greater importance with regard to the question at issue, is that it is a very practical demonstration of the fact that emblemism, *i.e.* the installation of spirits in selected emblems, is still going on. An experience which unmistakably proves that the adoration of the more immediate spirit fathers not only appeals more directly to these literal people, but that this course, apart from the ordinary feelings which are excited by family ties and associations, is absolutely essential and inevitable in order to preserve unbroken the continuity of the ancestral line, by holding on to the actual connection between the household in the flesh, and that portion of it which has but recently detached itself to the spirit.

Before passing on to a contemplation of the fresh-water spirits, it is advisable to call attention to two points which may have escaped the reader's notice, or regarding the comprehension of which he may have felt doubtful. These are the transfer of certain ancestral deities from the land to the water; and, in fact, of the "bad water" being personified into an evil god or devil, under different names, among the various tribes.

The question of transfer, which naturally took place when certain communities from the interior first came into touch with the sea, is easily disposed of, as merely a transfer of emblems, and not even of that in the case of the Brass tribal god, under changed or altogether new conditions; therefore, as the Ijo appear to have been first in possession all along the coast-line from Benin river to Bonny, the Ibibio or Akwa continuing the line to the Cross river, and presumably to the Cameroons, it is reasonable to infer that the later comers adapted themselves to meet the exigencies and requirements of the case, either by pouring old wine into new bottles, *i.e.* transferring the ancestral deities into fresh emblems, as we know they did, or by creating new deities altogether; a simple process of deifying certain great or virulent personalities, according

to the nature of the case, and installing them into applicable and selected emblems. This explanation applies equally to the personification of the troublesome and dangerous, therefore evil-intentioned water. For these natives do not believe in any specific Satan who was thrown out of heaven, distinctly natural as the idea must have originally been. For evil to them is a personification which possesses the innate energy or power to keep on reproducing, a power which is diffused and disseminated, not only in their own and animal natures, but even in the very attributes of the gods.

## CHAPTER X

### FRESH-WATER GENII

PASSING on into the interior, the spirits of the fresh-water rivers and streams are similarly constructed; they are human spirits who have been embodied in various ways, but usually in the form of fish and reptilia. But in spite of their varying emblems, there is absolutely no essential difference between them and those of the coast, as regards their spiritual character and potentialities, except perhaps—ancestral emblemism apart—that in the former, as previously remarked, there is rather more vindictiveness or virulence, although of course, as is only to be expected, the latter make up the deficiency in other directions, and so keep the balance even. Incomprehensible as this may appear, it is not really so when the idiosyncrasies of these natives are weighed in the balance and understood.

The explanation is one entirely of condition. For condition, as we have long since seen, is, equally with association, to which it is related, an essential factor, due in this specific instance to the fact that to the interior people a very small percentage, if any at all, are able to swim. As a natural sequence of this, water to them is naturally an element of greater dread than land, consequently the spirits belonging to, or in any way connected with it, except when purely ancestral, are regarded with special fear and aversion. On the same grounds the coast natives, having learnt to swim, have grown accustomed to an element which they now recognise as not only personal but beneficent, providing them with fish and trade; and to whom formerly a human sacrifice was made annually, with the object of



securing the latter by ensuring the safe return of the European merchant vessels.

Analysing this matter to its roots, it is in fact nothing but the old question of the basic instincts—in this instance, of confidence or its antithesis over again—the existence of which has developed in these coast natives a form of personal veneration for water similar to that which the interior people have for the earth, and which they themselves still retain, only as being ever so much younger, it is not by any means either so confirmed or so consistent. For the very fact of the fickleness and unstability of the element explains their own inconsistency towards it, the culminating example of which we have seen in the creation of a special sacrificial deity.

In the same ratio exactly, while the confidence of the interior natives is rooted in the earth as their typical benefactor, their suspicion is centred in the direction of water; *i.e.* from which they expect and anticipate danger or destruction, not so much from a hidden snake or lurking crocodile, as from animals obsessed by outcast or disembodied spirits, besides the countless cramp and similar demons, who, wary and unseen, are always on the look-out for unwary victims. It is these voracious monsters whose vengeance they most fear, and whose capacity they measure, both from the material sense of hunger and from the spiritual aspect of revenge, the abstract being to them in every way the shadow or soul, as it were, of the substance. For the spirits of the air are not always in evidence or tangible, while those of the forest are in some measure familiar, and to some extent combatable; besides the feeling that they are, so to speak, on their own ground, upon which they have an upright position and a firm footing, an erectness and a stability which they lose as soon as ever they put foot on water. And this taking of the ground from under their very feet, this substitution of an insecure and uncertain posture for a secure and tangible foothold, this changing from an element they know, and which is able and willing to support them, to one that they do not know, and whose sole idea is to make a shuttlecock of them, by altogether throwing them off their balance, is a mystery outside the reach of their philosophy, an unfathomable enigma, the thought of which

most certainly upsets their mental gravity in the same proportion as the element does their physical equilibrium. Because the fact that it toys with them as it does with the fallen leaves that it swirls away, inspires these people with the consciousness of their own abject helplessness and utter inability to cope with a power that is beyond their control; and it is this extraordinary potentiality, which to themselves they have exaggerated, that has more than any other feature magnified their natural fears. So they have come to look on water as on an element not merely teeming with spirits, but as being in itself alive, with an ever-conscious and active instinct of greedy malice, which instinct is communicated to the indwelling spirits. But this sensation of awe is not so much a constitutional tendency as it is a hereditary instinct, which like so many other instincts that they are possessed of, is a relic of animalism, so strongly developed in fact as to be identical with it; and it is in these instincts that the existence of that unconscious antipathy can be traced, which is responsible for and explains their attitude.

Yet turn the water into a god-house, make it but the abode of the ancestral animal, and even though it be swarming with lean and hungry crocodiles, the overmastering sensation of fear ceases to exist, but only with regard to the place in question, and the contempt that is born of confidence reigns in its stead. Or let the animal be herbivorous and comparatively inoffensive, or, at all events, not dangerous when unmolested, as in the hippopotamus of this locality, and the same fearlessness or absolute indifference as to its existence characterises these sons of Nature. So it is that the people paddle about, mothers with suckling infants, in mere cockle-shells, or astride of logs with their legs dangling in the water, which is swarming with crocodiles and hippos, showing the utmost *sang-froid* and unconcern.

Thus in many localities water is sacred on this account. Taking Oguta as an example, the water of the Oratshi river, or lake as it has been miscalled, is venerated, and the law forbids the killing of the emblematic crocodiles. The recognised belief with respect to these reptiles is, as we have seen in Section IV., that they never take human life except in retalia-

tion for an offence which has been committed against the ancestral deities. Being, as this is, a moral law from their unwritten judicial code that arose, as we saw in Section IV., out of social necessities, an offence under this heading—*i.e.* within the meaning of the principle and of the act *de facto*—applies not only to any injury committed against one of the sacred reptiles, but also to a charge such, *e.g.*, as murder or breaking an oath sworn on the ancestral emblem, which formerly was punishable by human sacrifice, and now, owing to the fear of the British Government, merely by the sacrifice of a goat.

Curiously enough, the ancestral spirit in this specific instance is described as the spirit of the water that is symbolised by the crocodile. This in itself is an interesting fact, demonstrating the old-time association of their ancestors with the water in question, who by connecting it, that is, the spirit principle, with these animals which were most in evidence, had recognised in them the subsidiary spirits, or active and retributive agents of the possessive and controlling element. Regarding the connection between this great and powerful spirit and the ancestral—even supposing, *e.g.*, that the people of Oguta had only settled in this locality a hundred or even twenty years ago—there is no difficulty. For, as we have seen, the question of the installation, transfer, or conjuration of a spirit not only into an emblem, but from one locality to another, is an easy matter to the priest or diviner, in other words, to the medium. So on the same lines and principle, deification in quite recent times, down even to the present day, is also a simple question of time, seven generations at the most, if in fact so much, which rests entirely on the personality of the individual and the concurrence of the household or community. In like manner, as a later operation, the crocodiles as well, occupying as they did the position of satellites, became ancestral emblems of a lesser order. This principle is not by any means confined or peculiar to the Oratshi at Oguta, or to any particular waters, but holds good in most, if not all places in which the water as an element in itself, *i.e.* as a deep, broad, swift river, or, again, as a treacherous and formidable body, is to be

feared on its own account. For in no sense does it interfere with the articles of transmigration, *i.e.* detract from the importance of the emblem or embodiment. On the contrary, it is but an accentuation of it, and when looked into is nothing but a mere question of co-operation between the greater or elemental spirit and those subordinate agents who do his bidding. Viewed from another aspect, there is about it a strong suspicion of that subtle art which seeks to ensnare two objects in the same net. While a further examination reveals the same line of action or development on which the later departmental deities have usurped and occupied the positions that in more remote times were filled by the earth and sky gods; so in precisely the same way the water spirit, although not necessarily inactive, has been placed on the shelf, with possibly an annual festival, but no special sacrifices made to it, because the more active reptile spirits have supplanted it in the favour or self-interests of the people, representing its activity, as they do, in a more active and destructive form.

Regarding this specific emblemism, there is one extremely significant feature which must here be noticed, and this is the fact that at Oguta and elsewhere crocodiles have been selected in preference to the hippopotamus, which also abounds in the Oratshi and other rivers. For not merely does the selection prove that oft-repeated assertion as to the predilection of these natives for those animals whose sagacity is greater or whose powers are more devilish, as compared with mere bulk and a less offensive nature, but it is clearly a practical demonstration that the destructive potentiality of animals constitutes in their eyes a necessary qualification as well as a distinct gain, *i.e.* a moral or substantial, but, equally so, a spiritual gain. Not only in fact did their ancestors, in the original instance of selection, find the carnivorous crocodile a more serviceable myrmidon than the huge but more timorous hippopotamus, but the very fact that the latter was herbivorous at once turned the scale in favour of the former.

It is in this particular direction that the significance of the matter lies. For, although the tribal clan or communal ancestor be only represented by a harmless emblem, as is the



case in many parts of the Delta, the moral or retributive system is in no sense wanting, filled as it is by judicial deities, such, *e.g.*, as the gods of justice and of proof or divination. In other words, the chief justice or superintendent of the criminal investigation department is always in evidence. More than this, an analysis into the deepest principles of their faith, especially of their own cannibalistic propensities, confirms this. Because in the eating of flesh there seems to be, according to their own ideas, an eating, as it were, of the substance and the shadow, *i.e.* of the soul—a case of dual satisfaction—the substance or flesh of the victim satisfying the animal, as the soul does the ancestral spirit it is believed to carry.

There are many other water divinities in connection with the numerous streams that intersect the higher and more solid ground north of, but immediately contiguous to, the actual Delta. Some at least, if not many of these, directed as they have been by men of greater force and subtlety of character, have obtained for themselves a more than local reputation, not only as diviners, but as punishers of crime. Worse than this, as I discovered in more than one instance, these particular places, which are practically death-traps, swarming as the water is with human-fed crocodiles, are purposely kept and utilised as a test by which the innocence of accused or suspected persons may be established—similar in principle, if not in every respect, to the poison ordeal of the Esere or Calabar bean, which is so much in vogue among the Efik and Ibibio, and that of sasswood, practised by the interior Ibo.

As far as the water test is concerned, it is simple, yet all the more revolting in its brutality. The victims, whether they are criminals or only accused persons, are taken in a canoe to the middle of the stream or pool, as the case may be, which is generally wide enough to nullify all chances of escape. The priestly escort then either make them jump or, as is more often the case, throw them into the water. Unable to swim, as many, most of them, in fact, are, their doom is doubly sealed, but even those who are able to do so have no chance of reaching the bank alive, for the cruel and hideous monsters are always hungry and always expectant. But the sequel is



better left untold, so we will pass over the gruesome details and the awful death agonies. That many people, women more especially, who, as being old or barren, are looked on with disfavour, or, still worse, as witches, are got rid of in this horrible manner, is an unfortunate fact, judging at least from the evidence which I collected. But although this extension of the ancestral jurisdiction beyond its own limits is most undoubtedly a departure from the original moral idea of domestic or tribal administration, making every allowance, as I personally and sincerely do, for the adverse conditions under which these natives have always lived, it is impossible not to reflect on the intensely animalistic nature of their humanity.

It is refreshing to turn from the brutal and destructive side of a religion to its more humane and constructive aspect, even although this partakes of the material. So if we look in other directions we find other water deities, who, as confined within the narrower circle of personal or protective limits, are less cruel and obnoxious. A good example of these is the maternal divinity of Ewulu—a large town in the Asaba hinterland—who is regarded by the people as their mother and protectress. This is nothing unusual, and instances are to be seen all over the country of communities whose guardian genius is a goddess, usually, however, in connection with the earth, and the explanation is simple, for it means that the communities in question were founded by strong and influential women, the entire history of which is being dealt with in the following section. As I was unable to pursue my investigations in this direction, I am unfortunately not in a position to unfold either tale or tradition regarding her origin or her idiosyncrasies.

One very curious feature, however, in connection with this river goddess is the fact that on the banks of the stream over which she presides grows a tree called Ukwa, which is so very highly prized by all natives on account of the flavour and succulence of its leaves, that these are usually cooked with the daily food, and eaten with a peculiar relish and gusto. And now comes the curious part of it all, for the prevailing tradition is that the leaves always fall on to the ground, and never into the water, a circumstance which,

however else it may be interpreted, is attributed by the people of Ewulu to the great beneficence of the water spirit.

Under the circumstances, it is impossible for me to offer any further explanation from the popular standpoint, for mere speculation without some form of data to go upon is but waste of time. It is just possible, however, that the leaf in question is believed by the natives to possess the same aphrodisiacal properties as the Okro. In this case, connected as this idea is with the principles of procreation, it is easy to comprehend their appreciation of beneficence; while associating it as they do with a deity belonging to water instead of to the tree itself, can only be explained by the one fact, which has so often been reiterated, that emblemism, although necessary, is supplementary, so that the former, as being the more ancient emblem of the ancestral, is revered more than the latter. This inference is confirmed by the position of the goddess as the protector of the town, and this position is doubly significant when we consider the fact that the actual river is, in every physical sense of the word, a distinct protection to the town, and is rendered all the more so by the deification, especially if it places, as in most cases it does, a prohibition or tabu on the passage of its waters.

## CHAPTER XI

### TABU, OR THE PROHIBITIVE ASPECT OF PROTECTION

THIS brings us to that question of tabu just referred to, which is one of such marked prominence in connection with water.

But, first of all, a digression as to the peculiar significance which is conveyed by this term from the local outlook. This is, in the first place, a moral restraint in a spiritual form that in old time was imposed by the patriarchal rulers, primarily for the purpose of protection, and of placing an effectual barrier where none existed between their own community and the world outside. Or yet again, as was palpably the case of the Bini, it was also a restriction from within for the purpose of keeping the people inside the boundaries, with the object of preventing or putting a stop to migrations or expansions—a distinctly prominent feature in the history of Benin, and, if the truth were known, of the whole country. But as the rulers and priests discovered that such protection or prohibition was only obtainable through the strongest measures, they appealed to their ancestral mediators, and so not only secured the divine sanction, but converted it, in the form of a river, water, or other natural obstacle, into an injunction, the passing or even attempted passage of which provoked the divine wrath. So that, sacred as the thing at once became in the eyes of all because of its deification, it also came to be recognised by the people themselves that to disobey the rule was to act in defiance of the divine edict, and to incur the supreme vengeance, because of an offence—an act of desecration—against the ancestral code. While, as regards the communities without their gates, the

effectuality of these divine injunctions, measured, that is, from opposing standpoints, is entirely reciprocal, for, actuated as one and all of these various units are by the same principle of aloofness and isolation, they are more or less equal in this direction. That the causes of this aloofness and the tabu have arisen from this desire, not merely to be left alone, but from a desire for independence and protection, is evident. What is still more evident is that this, which was a desire of the heart, *i.e.* of the deepest and inmost feelings, was considerably accentuated by the nefarious traffic in slaves which has always existed among these people, but which in more modern times was most unfortunately aggravated by European demands.

Go northward or southward, go to the east or to the west, tabu in every direction, and in some shape and form, is sure to meet us. It may be in the water, or it may be in the bush, a certain spot, a special locality, a particular house, a solitary tree. It may apply to the person of some individual king, who is hedged round, as the King of Benin was, with a divinity protected by an unctous theocracy of priests that reaches up to the very godhead. Finally, it may, and does, include every single animal emblem, upon whom is placed the strictest tabu of all, the tabu which forbids an animal of this kind to be killed, on pain of death. Indeed, this word "forbidden," of all others, best describes the principle involved, implying, as it does, a sacred ordinance which is out of bounds, *i.e.* beyond human limits, but inside the jurisdiction of some specific god.

It is exactly on this same principle that it is absolutely forbidden to certain chiefs and dignitaries to cross or even see certain water, just as kings have been and are confined to their own houses and compounds. At Oguta, Onitsha, Issele Oku, Idah, and in Ngwa and other parts of the interior, the kings are never allowed outside their own premises; and indeed in some places the rule is much more rigid, the incarcerated puppets being visible only to their families and personal attendants, and of course to the priests, while in certain cases—Benin city for example—the outside public and strangers are permitted to see their feet alone, which are

pushed out from behind a screen. That this ancient custom may have had something to do with the subsequent and more modern adulation of the extremities of the Papal Pontiff is very probable, for even in such trifles it is possible to trace the distant connection that exists between natural religion on the one hand and all the modern theologies on the other.

That these so-called kings are merely puppets in the hands of the priests, and not even ornamental figure-heads, is very evident, for in the event of their breaking the rule—a possible contingency under the circumstances, especially when the atmospheric variability of their natures is duly weighed and considered—they are obliged to pay a heavy penalty. This, amounting as it does to a human sacrifice, is generally prohibitive. For no matter how brutal and self-willed the individual is, the inordinate vanity and love of power and display so inherent in these natives is sufficient in itself to deter them from depleting their own households or communities; besides the fact that they appreciate the difficulty of forcibly seizing and of thus providing victims enough from the outside communities to meet the divine demands during the annual and other important rites, while purchasing them in a legitimate manner in the open market is recognised as a great expense. So that, ordinarily speaking, human sacrifice is an effectual deterrent to keep in check the king who, possessed of individuality, is inclined to kick over the traces. On the other hand, it is an institution that in its application to the question at issue demonstrates the priestly acumen, as well as knowledge of human nature.

In localities such as Oguta and Onitsha, *e.g.* where the influence of the British Government is felt, the rule to a great extent has relaxed, and in some cases altogether lapsed, so that in the former the penalty has been reduced to the sacrifice of a bullock. But this, almost equally with the other, serves the priestly purpose. For bullocks are comparatively scarce, therefore highly prized and expensive, so that even here the expense alone keeps their sable majesties of Lower Nigeria imprisoned within their own domestic confines. Yet, as I know to my cost in spirituous liquors and cigarettes, articles for which some of them have a predilection, it is an imprison-



ment that surreptitiously and by connivance is broken during the darkness of the night by more than one of these dusky royal marionettes.

In this custom, which is clearly traceable primarily to the personal egoism of the man, and secondarily as a later effort to the priest or thought leader, who in his heart objected to and was envious of the power of the patriarch, it is easy to see two distinct developments. First, the personal and very natural desire on the part of the patriarch or ruler for a self-glorification that strove for adoration. Then the aim and ambition of the aspiring priest to place himself on an equal footing with his ruler, to divide not merely the honours but the rule, somewhat on the old Roman or later Machiavelian policy of "divide et impera"; and his careful fostering of the idea until it became an accomplished fact, a diplomatic stroke by which he won for himself and his heirs *in perpetuo* not only a royal triumph, but the mastery over the kingly person.

That it is a very ancient custom, which came into existence during the early stages of religious development, subsequent, of course, to the ghost conception, is quite conceivable. For the eventual culmination of the human and personal desire for self-worship unmistakably led up to and ended in the deification of certain ancestral spirits. So the idea to establish a belief in the immortality of the king was of course inspired by the belief in the immortality of the soul. The wish, which, as we have seen all along, was father to every religious thought, became at once the supreme opportunity of the priest, who, to gain his own ends, converted the mortal illusion into an immortal reality. It was but the human failing that, without difficulty, leads even leaders of men into a belief of that which they passionately desire,—the same identical principle of which Terence says: "*Verum putes haud agre quod valde expetes*"—you believe that easily which you hope for earnestly, a belief the sincerity of which has been confirmed and sanctified by time. It was, in fact, an audacious, but, as it turned out, a successful attempt to immortalise the flesh, which they knew to be corruptible, a vulgar and clumsy imitation of the distant spiritual, which they so much dreaded; or yet again, the insolent initiative of the theocracy to wrest the patriarchal

mediatorship from the king by investing him with divine powers in his own deified person—an investment that not only conferred upon them the office of mediators, but which enabled them to localise and so to concentrate the ancestral power in their own hands. For by doing this they transferred, as it were, from the God above to the god below, *i.e.* from the invisible spirit to the visible human existence—in other words, into the king's own person—the more immediate and personal power which enhanced the administration of the country; and in this subtle way—for the subtlety of the whole development is beyond dispute—they attained their desires and the supreme culmination of tabu—*i.e.* the custody of the king-god, whose immortal sanctity is unapproachable and forbidden. Interpreted, as this lucid description has been, from the experience and evidence of existing realities, it is still more evident that the origin of these king-gods, as I have described it, which in the first instance was due to the action of the more aggressive type of priests, was still further improved on. For not satisfied with the lesser deities, or with even great potentialities, these theocracies advanced a step higher, with a daring and an arrogance that to this day is to be seen in the overweening vanity and bounce of their successors, and they boldly transferred the Supreme God from the sky above to their own personal earth below; the best examples of this are to be seen in the Tsuku Ibiamas of the Ama-Ofo or Aro, and the Egwe or Sky-God of the Egwe community, Benin city being rather more a type of the former class, examples of which on a smaller scale exist in various parts of the country. Indeed, even in those districts that are more immediately under our administration the tabu is still maintained, on the principle that by environing the kingship with a certain ring of exclusion, a greater dignity and influence over the people is obtained. I have already alluded in Chapter III. of this section to the prohibition that is placed on the colour of cloth and dyes, as well as on other articles, by the priests in connection with the ordinary ritual which is observable towards their deities, but I omitted in Chapter VI., when describing the worship of Ogidiga, to mention a curious privilege that appertains to that once all-powerful divinity, of reserving to himself all automatic

articles or mechanical instruments of European manufacture, such, *e.g.*, as clocks, watches, musical boxes, etc., all statuettes or figures made of metal or earthenware, in addition to anything having on it a pattern resembling the form or shape of the python. Awomakaso, the principal god of New Calabar, on the other hand, confines his tabu chiefly to cloth and hardware of certain flowery patterns, but his laws, similar to those of Ogidiga and other Delta deities, are extremely stringent, forbidding all persons except the priests and their wives to purchase the prohibited articles, inflicting forfeiture of the goods in question on those who break the law.

Another still more curious custom, and of greater psychological interest than this, associated as it is with the exclusiveness that surrounds the individuality of the patriarch, obtains among the Ibo. It appears that Eke, the fourth and last day of their week, is reserved by a chief or head of the house as his own special day for farming. On the other three days his men are free to work for themselves, but on this, which, by the way, from a religious aspect is treated as a day of rest or market day, also for the observance of the special weekly adoration of the ancestral gods, they are all obliged to work for him. Further than this, in many localities the chiefs will eat no food that has been cooked with water or palm oil, eating their yams quite dry and drinking water only. Similarly, women on Orio, the first day of the week, are obliged to remain in their own quarter and entirely by themselves, and no matter how well born or wealthy they may happen to be, they have to cook their own food and use separate utensils, and in making it the same restrictions—which have just been spoken of—are enforced. This is purely a religious formula, in consonance with the principle of exclusion, yet based no doubt in the original instance on a sanitary foundation of some sort, for the belief with regard to it is, that in the event of a person breaking the rule, the whole body will be affected with sores or eruptions—another of the numerous instances of the spiritual authority by which the human element is kept in moral order and subjection.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE SPIRITUAL AND DEIFIED ASPECT OF PHENOMENA

THE principle of adoration, or, to be more precise, the motive which has led up to that principle, is identical with regard to fire, air, wind, lightning, thunder, or rain, as to the more contiguous elements which have been discussed. But although these people recognise these elements which are very much in evidence in their environment, and although fire is in daily use and feared, therefore guarded against as a destructive spirit by a spirit medicine which ranks as a household deity, there is no specific fire god, not at least to my knowledge, in any of the localities which were visited by me. Nor in fact has the sun been elevated to any such exalted position. This, however, as we have seen in Chapter VII., does not preclude the specific adoration of these heavenly bodies among certain people and communities, nor is it in any sense due to all want of a sublimer philosophy, or to non-contemplation of the glorious orbs on their part, but to a complete indifference, amounting almost to apathy, which has been handed down to them as an ancestral legacy. Not because they do not regard them with respect or awe, for we know that awe to them is a natural instinct, which is freely outpoured towards any object that is a mystery to them ; what is more, they recognise, for example, that the sun is the inspirer, if not the source of all heat and light, but simply because it is so far off, so distant in fact, and on the whole so beneficent, as to be an altogether impersonal matter to them.

An exactly similar feeling prevails regarding the moon and stars, upon which they look, as they do upon the sun,



with the same outward calm and phlegmatic philosophy as their ancestors before them have done, but in a comparative sense, more especially with reference to the stars, as being of smaller power and beneficence, therefore of less account. Here also, as in every salient feature connected with their faith that has been probed to its deepest depths, the question of personal proximity, precedent, and association stares us in the face. Indeed, no better example of this connection, as also of their unchangeable conservatism with regard to religion, can be instanced than in this their attitude towards the natural elements and phenomena; their excessive attachment and veneration for the two, from which they cannot detach themselves, even when in the spirit; that lesser association with those phenomena that are removed but still tangible to them, and their utter disregard for the most distant, which are altogether beyond their reach. For besides confirming the fact of the inevitable essentiality of association, or at least of a tangible proximity in connection with religious emblems that is requisite in order to inspire a wholesome awe—the right and specific sort necessary to command respect and to preserve authority—it shows us that in no sense has there ever been a lapse from the ancient faith.

It is more than possible, it is exceedingly probable, that the philosophy of the present natives has grown rusty, and that they have forgotten some, if not many of the most subtle points and arguments, the underlying motives and guiding principles that inspire the earlier beliefs, but it is also quite certain that they have held fast to the faith and practices, *i.e.* to that which has seemed good in the eyes of their fathers, who, it is quite evident, never aspired to the adoration of those objects which, as far as they were concerned, possessed for them neither tangibility nor directness. So it is that there is no direct or pronounced adoration of the celestial bodies, which, as subservient to the Creator, are unconsciously included in their annual obeisance to, their one great effort of recognition of, him. Yet, strangely enough, judging at least from some of their fables, they have an idea that the Supreme God is, as it were, a maker of and purveyor in the heavenly orbs, which he will purvey, not exactly on a mere consideration, but if it is



made worth his while. For so far as even he is concerned there must be an equivalent, evidently with the object of preserving the inevitable balance; and what is more, it must be a substantial measure, *i.e.* it must be equally a spirit offering with a substance, as a substance with a spirit.

We may contrast their aloofness or avoidance of the celestial planets with their attitude towards phenomena such as rain, thunder, lightning, and wind. Taking the first of these, although the rain god is neither universal nor strictly departmental, there are in existence in various parts of the country deities who profess to confer on their successors or protégés the power of making or withholding rain. As an instance of this, at Isiokwe, in the Onitsha hinterland, Edemili, the ancestral god of protection, who, by the way, is an agricultural divinity, is both a maker and extinguisher of the cloud fluid. As another instance, at a place called Omo-pra-Ebelu, on the northern confines of the Ibibio country, I had an interesting personal experience with one of these utilitarian deities in the accommodating person of a local diviner, who, it appeared, was his representative. Indeed, for the modest sum of two heads of Virginian tobacco and a bottle of trade gin—in all to the value of tenpence—this wily old doctor of divinity and L.D.O., or Learned Doctor of the Occult, placed at my disposal the services of himself and god in the face of a lowering sky which threatened us with a second deluge that would have appalled the heart of the stoutest rain-stopper, unless he were too blind to see. No so our doctor! Conscious as he was of everything going on around him, he was in no sense abashed, but accepted, with as much dignity as it is possible for craftiness to assume, his fee, which had been exactly doubled, quite unconscious, however, of any divine or personal propensity for either the fragrant weed or the spirit-inspiring liquid. Then confident as to results, and blind only in the superb sincerity of his faith, without a tremor or a blink, he faced the oncoming and angry-looking demon, who was preparing to hurl himself upon us in the form of wind and rain, and appealing to the ancestral staff that was in his hand, with but a mouthful of words, and an oblation of tobacco and gin, he propitiated him at least for that day,

saving us, in his own reserved estimation, a good drenching; for curiously enough, as it happened, although a slight drizzle fell, the storm passed away, and the day remained fine.

On another occasion, in the Ibo interior, it was again my good fortune to encounter at Omo-nkwa a chief by name Ekuro-ego, who performed for me a similar office, and gave me an equally interesting introduction. Austere and irascible at first, as king of the town, he received myself and party with great asperity. Indeed, it was not until a great deal of talking had ensued on both sides that he consented to keep us for the night, and then only after he had bound us down by a solemn oath, which had to be sworn on the ancestral emblem, to keep the peace in deed as well as in word. Mollified, however, by the present which he had received, Ekuro-ego to some extent relaxed and evinced a certain amount of anxiety to make up for his earlier rudeness. So much so, that when towards evening it began to drizzle, in reply to my query whether any one in the locality was able to stop rain, he at once set about and made preparations to do so. Phenomenally grave in his demeanour, and abnormally staid as he was in all his movements, he displayed as much alacrity as was consonant with the dual dignity of his position, combining a human kingship with a spiritual advocacy. Producing with great caution his special medicines and his specific emblems, the bitter water, a tortoise-shell, and a human skull, he placed them all with deliberation on the ground.

It was evident at the outset that this Ibo rain god, like his *Ibibio confrère*, was no teetotaller; unlike him, however, he was a non-smoker, for prior to commencing work he demanded a bottle of spirits only; indeed, this question of a preliminary fee is an essential feature of all such operations. What these were in this particular instance it is unnecessary to repeat, beyond the fact that they consisted principally in the alternate drinking of the gin by the advocate himself, and in a spiritual baptism of the emblems, whom he drenched all over with the fiery liquid, as well as by the spurting of it in a defiant but decidedly dignified manner in the direction of the stormy sky—last, but by no means least, by a spluttering invocation to his spiritual Master, which was made with a mouth

full of spirit, in evident appreciation of past favours, and with a pathetic appeal for a further continuance of them. Whether this advocate of his fathers was in very deed a practical weather prophet or not, or whether the matter was again one of mere coincidence, is a question that the reader must decide for himself, but again I must acknowledge that although we had a light shower of rain, it was not the downpour that from the appearance of the sky might have been reasonably expected.

But if there is no specific fire or rain god there is at least a tornado divinity, who, practically speaking, answers the purpose of both, including in his capacious scope of potentialities the devastating wind and the sonorous thunder. Of this fierce and impetuous deity I can also speak from personal experience. The tornado, as experienced in Southern Nigeria, whether in the bush or on the water, is a phenomenon that is bound to impress itself on the mind of a thoughtful man. In their contemplation of things natural, the tornado is to them not merely, as we regard it, a phenomenon made up of certain material elements, but the complex operation of a real live god, whose evil personality is seen, and, what is more, felt, in the fury and vigour with which his demons do their work in carrying out his instructions. For the different constituents of which it is composed, thunder, lightning, wind, and rain, acting, as they appear to do, independently of each other, are sufficiently terrifying in themselves. But when these join issue, as it were, in one terrific onslaught upon the shrinking earth below, with its tossing trees and cowering humanity, there is in the audacious but splendid harmony of the attack, as well as in the infernal discord of its concord, a distinct suggestion of taking the offensive from every quarter.

Thus, although they believe in a separate wind god who controls the winds, and find in thunder and lightning an individual deity who talks in the former and strikes with the latter, and although they look on rain as an element which is in the hands of agents, who can make or mar it at their will, they recognise in the tornado a devastating deity of great power, whose engines of destruction are lightning, rain, and

wind. Such a god is Ewitaraba of the Andoni, who is esteemed of such importance as to rank second only to Yor Obulo, their governing god.

This being the case, he is included by them in the select circle of communal deities, in whose honour an annual ceremony is observed, and at this a white ram is sacrificed for his special edification. But this hard smiter is of greater and more personal significance to his people than merely posing before them in the semblance of a wooden image as a destroyer. For we find him taking an extremely active part in their social life as a judge with extensive powers; consequently, therefore, in all personal matters between contending parties and individuals it is customary to swear or make oath on the emblem by which he is represented. Indeed, so great is the faith of these natives in the destructive potentialities of this divinity, that it is further the custom for any person who considers himself aggrieved against another, because of some offence or injury that he believes the latter to have committed against him, to call down the divine vengeance upon the offender.

At the same time, any offender upon whom the vengeance of Ewitaraba has been invoked is entitled, whether guilty of the charge or not, to avert the threatened calamity in the former instance, and in the latter to obtain redress as well, but he must do so through the mediation of his parents, or of some influential friend. In either case the mediators are obliged to pay all losses and expenses that have been incurred by the plaintiff, including the restoration of any people or property that have been taken from him, to his complete satisfaction. Then the plaintiff is obliged to make an offering of reinvocation and compromise to the presiding judge god, which is a settlement in full of the entire business, and usually consists of the following: mashed yams and plantains mixed with oil, fresh fish, a mullet of some kind, called Nde-yeh or Orgbolu, and a bottle of spirits, according to the taste of the priest officiating. This oblation is taken by him to the water-side in a small canoe, and laid at the shrine of the god, to whom, in the presence of all concerned, he addresses the following brief but pithy petition: "Ewitaraba

fara ka tere-ele-inu-ege-ege,"—Pardon, O Ewitaraba, this man upon whom I invoked thy vengeance.

It is interesting, from an ethnological aspect, to note that this tornado god is in every respect similar to Sango, the Yoruba god of thunder and lightning, also of fire, whose acquaintance we made in Chapter III., and it is all the more interesting because, in conjunction with other evidence that is on hand, it clearly demonstrates how closely associated are the two religions. It is possible, too, to trace in this association the explanatory connecting link between the Semitic and the Negroid races, that is to be seen in the resemblance which is imputed to exist in their respective languages.



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE INTELLECTUAL CAPACITY OF THE NATIVES IN ITS RELATION TO EMBLEMISM

WE are, it seems to me, too apt to compare the barbarian, speaking collectively, of course, to the child, forgetful of the fact that as far as the emotions are concerned he is in every sense as much an adult as the European; and in this respect our comparison is, to say the least of it, inappropriate, if not erroneous. For a study of these Delta natives will effectually dispel a misconception so palpable as this, teaching us, as it taught me, that while in intelligence natural man is yet an infant—a fully grown-up and developed infant, however, in instincts and emotions—he is much older, *i.e.* nearer to Nature, than the civilised unit; he is less disciplined or restricted, and he is swayed by passions, impulses, and egoism, generally, to a much greater extent. It is impossible then to reconcile a statement such as that which compares the rag or wax doll of the European child to the idol of the savage. Admitting, however, that the former personifies its doll, its motive for doing so is entirely different from that which attracts the latter to his hideous images. That the child's motive is possibly, or even probably, due to an unconscious but inherent instinct is admissible, and that it is also in part the result of the imitative faculty—which is certainly a hereditary tendency—cannot be disputed. For the behaviour of the child to its doll is undoubtedly a copy of its mother's attitude toward itself—on the one hand the same maternal affection and solicitude for its personal welfare, its food, drink, and clothes; on the other maternal management and discipline, varied

possibly by a régime of scolding or undue severity. For even granting that the child possesses a strong share of personal individuality, it will be conceded that, as a rule, its treatment of the doll is to be taken as a fairly accurate reflex of the mother's conduct with regard to itself or other children belonging to the family.

Yet personified though it is, on no account is that doll alive or in any sense inspired in the eyes of the child, because it recognises the absolute difference between its own brothers or sisters and the doll that it plays with. For the very fact that it can do with the latter, without a response of any kind, what it cannot do to the former, without either consultation, remonstrance, or compulsion, constitutes a difference which conveys a decided conviction to its inquiring, observant, and perplexed mind. Further than this, however, the child has little perception, and beyond a vague idea, no definite comprehension of the soul or spirit—as it has been humanly conceived; for outside the limited circle of its own personal surroundings its mind is a blank, while the barbarian most undoubtedly has a tangible and defined conception of this, which to him is the cause of that effect which we call existence. It must, therefore, be admitted that in spite of the serious way in which the child avowedly takes the doll, this is more a plaything—a matter of imitation and occupation—than anything else. In other words, it is the desire for movement and action on the child's part—which is so characteristic and distinctive a feature of the reason-endowed animal as compared with the instinct-controlled beast that actuates it, a desire that is to be seen even in the infant, which can be said to be instinct with vitality, that is synchronous with its early development of the faculty of observation.

Not so the barbarian, however. With him the Ju-Ju or emblem is no child's play, no mere outlet for a state of activity which he is not particularly desirous of, not even a safety-valve by which the accumulated steam of his pent-up emotions might escape, but a matter of life and death, connecting, as it does, one to the other, *i.e.* himself and household to the household in the spirit. To natural man this grotesque image of clay or wood is no mere toy, no senseless figure, that

he moulds or carves for amusement during his hours of leisure, simply to kill time with.

So this bundle of repressed but irrepressible emotions appeals to his household doll, as to an association—not in a merely abstract but in a personal sense, as a lifelong association, to which, connected and related as he is, from a twofold aspect, he is doubly bound. He appeals to it, as to a familiar object, embodying, as it does, his familiar and guardian spirit, not because he merely thinks or hopes this to be so, but because in all sincerity he feels and believes it to be the case. More than this, because he believes it to be the spirit of his father or grandfather, who, in accordance with the divine instructions, occupies the position of communicator and mediator between the human and spiritual households.

Is it in the least surprising, therefore, that when his time is occupied with the Ju-Ju, the matter to him is of the supremest moment? All the more so when we consider that he believes himself to be in actual touch with the ancestral spirits, in whose hands the fate of his whole household is involved, and dominated, as he is, by the haunting fear of unexpected doom, which may fall on him or on any member of the family at any moment.

Analysing the matter thus, is it possible then, in even the strictest sense, to compare this child in intelligence, but adult in emotions, to the child of civilisation?

Is there not even in his intelligence more sense and subtlety than there is in the child? Are his sensations and energies as a father and a husband, his personal contact with the experiences and events that he is daily brought into touch with, in no sense to be taken into consideration? And is his knowledge of this world and of the phantasmal, which divides the rule in his mental domain with the real, not to be weighed in the balance against the much more evanescent and reflective knowledge of the most civilised and precocious child, which, as we know, is purely and almost entirely one of illusion?

The earnest student is bound to be impressed with the contrast between the two—the fundamental sameness that is common to both child and adult, yet the preponderating differentiation in mental gravity and natural subtlety which

sheer experience, in the ordinary course of events, produces even in barbaric adolescence—the effect, in short, of the cause, time, which is after all but a natural growth and development.

Admitting his ignorance and his inconsistencies, has he not a deeper and more subtle knowledge of Nature, human and animal, with its glaring contrasts and its startling complexities, and a greater grasp of the purpose and philosophy of life than even the precocious and well-educated child? Is it not true that the instincts and passions exercise a decided influence on the reason of the barbarian or of youth, unrestrained as both of them are; but controlled, as the former is, by emotions, are not these to some extent—unconsciously and indirectly it may be—guided by reason?

Is there, too, no connection, or even association between the impulse and the motive which sets it in motion?

Is the blind faith and persistent sincerity of the eternal human ages to count for nothing, and to be lightly or facetiously compared to the mere pastime of a thoughtless and careless child?

Is all this real sincerity and solid faith to be estimated as worthless, and is the believer to be classed as a pagan and an idolater, while the disciples of the Greek and Romish churches are dubbed Christians—a sufficiently meaningless phrase from a rational standpoint—because the European has either entirely misunderstood or grossly misrepresented the tenets of his religion?

If so, of what use to the Christian, it may be asked, is his own faith or sincerity—virtues that he esteems so highly and extols so bravely—when sincerity that is sincerer, and faith which is blinder than his own, is looked down upon with a pity that is but contempt concealed or in disguise.

Or is faith to be regarded from a purely rational, therefore all the more reasonable standpoint, as merely the negative evidence of an incurious ignorance that shrinks or rather flinches from inquiry, because it dreads the stark and bitter truth?

Be the answer to these queries as it may, it is impossible for us, in the face of even so trivial an inquiry as this, to assert that the barbarian, in spite of the brutality and blind-



ness of his faith, is a child any more than is the ordinary Christian or Mohammedan. That, like the child, he is nearer to Nature, *i.e.* more literal and cruel, in fact brutal, is also not to be denied; but that he is brutal only in a different degree, and not in any way in a different sense or kind, is surely reasonably admissible. And this is a fundamental fact—pointing to that oneness which, even in the most complicated condition of disintegration or dualism, is inevitable—that we cannot in any sense whatever either afford to overlook or to avoid. Indeed, if we accept the experience that the child is nearer to Nature than the adult, and from every aspect this is a very reasonable admission, in no one portion of it is it more so than with regard to the cruelty or, let us call it, attitude of the child towards animals. For even when there is no conscious or pronounced cruelty, there is in the child's general treatment of animals an unconscious refinement of cruelty that is none the less galling to the unfortunate victim which falls into its ever-ready clutches. In the same way the barbarian is brutal, often as much to his own kind as to the animal, whom he looks on as inferior, but with this difference, that unlike the child who is irresponsible, it is not always or only for the pure love of torture that he is thus brutal, but from a deep sense of a conscious duty and responsibility, which, as directly due to his ancestors and in a less direct sense to the animal emblems, cannot either be shirked or avoided. For—if at least we judge the barbarian by these Delta natives—children though they are in a fundamental sense, even from this natural aspect, they are at all events fully developed and adolescent children, who are possessed of strong, fierce passions and well-formed inherent characteristics, in addition to hard and bitter life experiences that have burnt into their very souls with the fire of reality, whose outlook on life, in spite of an unexpanded intelligence and youthful imagination, is to them an ever serious and inevitable problem, the control and mystery of which is in ancestral hands.

This question, however, of natural man's attitude towards the ancestral world has been already sufficiently explained. It is evident that, as far as these people are concerned, it is one that they cannot entirely escape from, any more than we our-



selves can from an inherited religion, but which they can improve, by striving after and attaining to the artificialities and refinements of civilisation.

Reference has more than once been made in this section to the immaterialism of emblemism, but before concluding it is necessary to impress upon the mind of the reader one prominent feature in connection with it. This is the fact that the emblem—especially if it be an animal—is in no true sense indicative of the functions or attributes of the deity represented, the evidence of which is to be seen in the absolute want of analogy, or, in fact, in the utter inappropriateness of the former with regard to or as compared with the latter.

So we find, for example, that Ekiba, the war god of the Ibani, was first emblemised by a monkey and then by an iguana; that the Okrika, a truculent and savage community, had as their ancestral symbol a pigeon; that at Onitsha, five blocks of wood represented Tsi, the supreme god, and that in the same place Ani, the earth goddess, is a clay figure, while at Ogbe-abri, a little farther off, she appears to the people in the form of a tree. These are facts, the hard and fast evidence of which is found all over the country in the variety and insignificance of the countless emblems, which prove incontestably, that while material embodiment is essential and significant of one of the main principles of the ancestral faith, the actual matter and shape which forms the individual emblem is, in itself, immaterial and of no vital significance—apart, of course, from the personal and ancestral association that is connected with it. This at once explains the reason for the choice of the monkey by the ancestors of the Ibani, and subsequently of the iguana by their successors, because in each case these animals were most in evidence in their respective environments; and further, it accounts for the selection of Dema, the shark, by the latter to uphold the ancestral discipline. So at Oguta and other places in the vicinity of water, although the crocodile was apparently chosen in preference to the hippopotamus, the exception only proves the rule, for wherever we look we find prevailing the same utter disregard for outward appearances or character, yet the utmost deference to the pervading spirit power.

SECTION VII

THE CEREMONIALS AND PRACTICES OF  
NATURISM

in the priesthood a profounder depth of subtlety than is to be found in the people, who, because they think less and, in a diffuse and impulsive manner, represent the shallowness and superficiality of natural thought to a much greater extent.

The concentration of the priests gives them a decided unity and strength of purpose, while the want of it on the part of the people at once explains their subservience to the former.

But, in spite of this superior mentality, it is, curiously enough, in the priesthood more so than in the people that we are confronted with a much greater depth of animalism. For just as in one direction they rise, as it were, and so get nearer to the gods, so in another they sink until they come into contact with those animals who are to them emblematical of the former. In other words, while their thoughts, hopes, and aspirations soar upwards along the line of spiritual associations that connect them with the gods, they cannot wrench themselves away from these material but personal links which, on the other hand, bind them hard and fast to the species that, although beneath, is one with them. And it is in this extraordinary contrast that the mental subtleties of naturism stand revealed.

Yet in no sense is this inexplicable, because, in spite of the seeming contrast, it is in reality—as we saw in Chapter III., Section V.—merely two external aspects of the same internal spiritualism, which combine together in the unity of the human mental. Dip deep down into the very heart of the subtleties in question, make an analytical and scrutinising study of these priestly beings, who are most indubitably a mixture of the animal and the human; compare this with an equally observant criticism of the reptiles and animals, which, as emblems of the gods, are sacred to them, and the entire evolution of natural religion, from the basic germs, with its long chain of ancestral associations and connections, down to its latest development, will at once become evident to the truthful and clear-sighted observer. But to analyse the question any further is at present both impossible and unnecessary.

Yet dual and inconsistent in their characteristics as the priests inevitably are, when weighed in the balance, as against

the people, it will be seen that they take life, in a double sense, much more seriously than the latter, and that although they enter into the vanities and frivolities of their barbaric environment in conjunction with their flocks, they only do so as utilitarians, with the ostensible objective of utility dangling before their very eyes, seeing in the vanities of others the serious and unflinching purpose of life—in other words, the opportunity of utilising these human foibles on behalf of the spiritual. But if these devilishly subtle advocates are to a great extent devoid of the humour of their more simple brethren—a markedly strong characteristic of theirs, counterpoise as it is to the gloomy pessimism of their natures—there is in them at least a keener and more delicate sense of discrimination and appreciation, a quicker acumen, a livelier tongue, a readier wit, a greater depth of patience and of reticence, a much deeper guile, a stronger reserve of strength, dignity, and self-possession; above all, a more thorough and comprehensive grasp of human and animal nature. If, too, the light and frolicsome or laughter-loving side of life only appeals to these crafty and professional panderers and go-betweens, as apostles of opportunism, their keenness of vision has at least taught them to differentiate between the lean and the substantial; in other words, the airiness and elasticity of the spirit shadow as compared with the solidity of the concrete substance.

It is, in fact, this natural idiosyncrasy—of combining the tragedy and comedy of life into a judicious blend of dignified pathos, that bristles all over in the grim appreciation of silence with the aggressive severity of its sincerity—that in a word explains how it is that dancing, singing, and feasting originally became, and still remain, as customs, which in their very essence—both primarily and fundamentally—are purely and naturally religious, being an exuberance, on the one hand, of spirits, so called, or sensations, that are essentially animalistic; but expressing, on the other hand, in the cultivated frenzy of certain overmastering emotions, a tacit acknowledgment of the human subjection and, at the same time, of the spiritual supremacy. Realise and appreciate these very natural differences that exist between the priests and the people, somewhat on the lines of sheep who have a shepherd, but with this broad

distinction, that while the latter, in spite of their greater proximity to the gods, are the blacker of the two, the former, with all their seeming docility, are a stiff-necked and headstrong throng, who, although they are easily led, cannot be driven at all, much less with impunity; and then we can all the more easily understand the nature of the men who lead, and that of the men who, notwithstanding their impetuosity and stubbornness, follow their tactful and diplomatic leaders with submissiveness.

That the power of these ghostly counsellors is to some extent curtailed or diminished by the influence of the doctors and diviners there is not the slightest doubt, for although their offices are quite distinct and their ministrations lie in different directions, dealing, as they one and all do, with a spiritualism outside the demonology of witchcraft, that in its essentials is practically identical, differing merely in its external emblemism, it is impossible to avoid interference or to prevent encroachment. Yet in spite of all, the priests, in most of those places that, so far, have not been administered by ourselves, manage to divide the government of the communities with the kings and chiefs. For while, as a general rule, the former are more or less if not entirely a social evil, the latter, in addition to this, are a political factor, and, as has just been pointed out, have undoubtedly to be reckoned with. Not, however, that the medical and divining fraternity are mere ciphers in a country where witchcraft and intrigue are rife, but because the position they occupy is one rather of isolation and independence than of society or dependence, as being much more in consonance with their professional character and the motive that imbues and impels it. From the purely native standpoint, in fact, doctors are priests and priests are doctors, when spoken of in connection with aches and medicines. But in a purely religious sense, in their relationship to the communal and family gods, only the Nri clan among the Ibo, and all first-born sons, the Di-okpara, and no others, are recognised as officiating priests. What is more, no stranger, be he ever so renowned in medicine, is allowed to officiate on any occasion or pretext whatsoever.

There can be little if any doubt that originally the



patriarch himself was priest as well as ruler of his own establishment, but that later on, when he had established himself securely as medium and advocate with his own immediate spirit father, he handed over the priestly office to his eldest son. This ancient custom is still to be seen in every household in the Delta, in which, while the first-born son represents the family in the flesh, his father, in virtue of his natural priority, is more closely associated with the family in the spirit. For the first-born son, called Okpara in Ibo, and Akobi in Yoruba, is considered sacred, and occupies, during his father's lifetime, the position of family and officiating priest. Thus it is that on account of this sacred office he breaks the kola nuts and distributes them to the guests or members present, and for the same reason pours out the tombo, or palm wine, to all visitors. Further, when household sacrifices are to be performed, he always officiates, especially on the death of his father, in cutting the throats of the victims, as well as in sprinkling the blood over certain emblems and persons, and finally, no family matter can be or is settled unless he is present.

The reason of this, as we have seen, is due to the sanctity, in their eyes, of primogeniture—which, as natural and divine, is a law unto them, as being the direct result of an act that has been made with the concurrence and through the spiritual agency of the supreme god. This belief is in itself a sufficient cause to sanctify the person of the eldest son, but there are yet other reasons, which, according to their ideas, mark him down as the spiritually selected representative of the household. Briefly, these are: (1) that the first-born is considered to inherit fully all the virtues of his father—the vices not even being alluded to. (2) Again, it is generally believed that in his position as eldest son and spirit specialist, he is thoroughly proficient with regard to the disposition and humours of the deities, as well as to the manner of approaching them, because as having a greater, also a more direct and specific access to the person of their common spirit father than the rest of the family, he is in consequence better qualified to know more of the attributes, rites, and ceremonies by which they are to be lauded and worshipped. (3) By virtue of his office, he acts

not only as the general superintendent but as the father of all the slaves, *i.e.* domestics, belonging to the household, dealing with each individual if necessary in the capacity of a father. (4) He invariably officiates on the occasion of all religious festivities; and finally, (5) at any meeting in which several families have assembled for social or other purposes, precedence is invariably given to all first-born sons in preference to chiefs of high rank, despite the fact of their wealth, their power, and their influence.

But although—to return once more to the question of origin—priestcraft subsequently expanded from the exclusively personal and household into the communal matter, it was unquestionably from the former that the priesthood of the latter first came into existence. It is this close relationship between the two that explains the reason why, even in the rudest condition of society, the priests have always—not so much espoused the cause of or sided with the kings or rulers, as that they have belonged to them: relic as this was of that primitive social state when the head of the family or chief of the community had been, as it were, high priest, and the eldest son the working or officiating member. For, when looked into, the whole question resolved itself into one of a community of interests, a sinking of one individual self into the persons and individualities of many selves. Yet it was a community which co-operated simply in a spiritual sense, and only when its mutual interests were in jeopardy and threatened by an influence that was inimical and powerful, that necessitated combination as a countermove in order to avert a common danger or prevent a wholesale disaster. For, in the ordinary course of events, every household ruled itself, and went on its own way, either rejoicing or sorrowing.

Morality—which primarily consisted of sanitary and social laws, that were not only essential to but preservative of existence—was essentially and distinctly an outcome of certain personal privileges and exigences, as these in their turn were an evolution from those sentient and fundamental instincts which formulated themselves into that personal element which is the religion of Nature. For, as we have previously seen, morality is religion and religion morality; so that the supposed

line of demarcation between the two, non-existent as it is to the rational and reasonable humanitarian, who, practical, truthful, and blessed as he is with a vision that is clear, keen, and penetrating, can see through and beyond the diaphanous mists of phantasmal imagination into the reality of existence as it is, and not as Christianity would portray it to be, is only perceptible in the abstract; whereas the irrational and unreasonable theologian, whose mental vision, blinded as it is by the bigotry of creed, dogma, and faith, that are but phantoms of his own unhealthy conception, is oblivious to the truth of Nature. The fact, therefore, that in all climes and at all times, priests, acting, as they have done, as political advisers to their monarchs, have left their ruddy mark on religious history, is easily explained. More than this, the invariable rule—as we see it among these natives—is to find the influence and power of the priesthood on the side of conservatism, *i.e.* of the patriarch or head of the community, and, as this personal principle is so involved in the religion of natural people that it may rightly and justly be denominated as their religion, the situation explains itself.

Looking at the question from this standpoint, progress and advancement represent reform, and reform, apart from the fact of their extreme aversion to it, implies danger, if not destruction, to the cause of their fathers as well as of the fathers themselves. So the power of the priestly craft was as necessary to uphold the rulers as that of the rulers was to maintain and protect the craft. In a few words, it was but a mutual co-operation society which combined together for purposes of defence and offence if necessary, and which was bound to each other by a compact that was not only solemn but personal and related; and in fewer words still, it was merely a family bond and covenant.

In this way, too, following the bent of their own human inclinations—*i.e.* along the destructive line, which to natural man was, as it still is, the line of least resistance—religion has been intimately connected with war. Not simply because its priestly exponents have either mildly or blindly followed the people, but on the contrary, in most instances, because they have led the way by exciting and inflaming the popular

mind—which is so quickly excited and so easily swayed—to kill and slay in the sacred name, and in the more sacred cause of their governors in the spirit, whose commands they are bound to obey and execute.

As a class, the offices of high and officiating priests, in charge of the tribal or governing deities of a community, are invariably hereditary; but with regard to the latter the rule is apt to be relaxed when persons are selected or set apart for the purpose because of their special fitness and adaptation to the work in question, in modern parlance, because they make excellent mediums. People of a nervous disposition, or those who are predisposed to epilepsy or hysteria, are not, as we have already seen in Part II., chosen as priests, but are undoubtedly utilised by the latter as oracles, prophets, or mediums, through whom they effect their own specific purposes, and in this way not only maintain but enhance the public credence, not so much in their religious beliefs—which merely on account of their ancestral origin are never doubted—as in themselves and their divine office, an aspect of the case which is seen in its most sacred and deepest significance in the attitude of all the original Ibo clans towards their Nri progenitors.

I have already said as much in Part I. as is, for the object of the book, necessary to demonstrate the peculiarly divine and personal sanctity that presents itself to these people in this law or action of the natural order of human birth and succession, but I would here once more impress upon the reader the essential importance of grasping this very plain and tangible fact. For there is in it, not simply a revelation with regard to the simple naturalism of their character, but it enables us to follow up the long chain of ancestral associations and precedents that, in their minds, connects the sacred earth with the equally sacred person, as well as the person with the earth, and both together again with the great Spirit Father and Generator on high. In this way, then, and from this fundamental standpoint, a study of the veneration that is accorded the Nri section, and the pungent odour of awesome sanctity with which time and the order of precedence have enveloped them, is specially



and pre-eminently needful. For just as the first-born son, by virtue of his birth, becomes the family priest, so the Nri family, for the same sacred reason, are not only the progenitors but the priests of the whole Ibo race, and as such, high priests, taking precedence of all other fraternities, priestly, social, and political. This fact is all the more significant among a people who not alone are extreme sticklers in the direction of social etiquette, but who place the order of precedence or nature above and before every other order, being as it is to them the indisputable gradation, that is from the Supreme Creator and Controller; because it emphasises the fact, that notwithstanding the state of isolation and independence in which they live with regard to one another, and in spite of the innumerable and incessant petty differences that exist between the various clans and communities in their commercial and other relations with each other, in this personal and priestly sense, at all events, the Ibo are in every respect national, if not a nation—a sense that, in their estimation, is not only more sacred and significant than language, but in every way more binding.

With regard to other parts of Southern Nigeria, however, the political influence of the priests varies in localities, although on the whole, and speaking generally, it is widespread and powerful—that of the Aro or Inokun being presumably the strongest. For although among the Ibo proper they come second to the Nri, their influence among tribes such as the Efik, Akwa, Ibibio, Ijo, and all the coast tribes was, previous to its overthrow by the British Government, undoubtedly greater, as was that of Benin in another direction. In the latter city, for example, also prior to its destruction by ourselves, the theocracy were paramount, and the king but a puppet in their hands. This, however, is a feature which is bound to be common in a country where the patriarchal or communal system prevails. Yet, exacting as is the government of the priests, there is in witchcraft a much more dominant and dreaded factor. For the spiritual supremacy is divided between the two crafts; but while that of the former represents the natural or ancestral spiritualism,



the devilish subtleties of sorcery or human one-sidedness are all on the side of evil and destruction.

It is not in the least surprising, therefore, that, under circumstances such as have been described, the dual office of king and priest is not now communally exercised, although in his own household every head is spiritual advocate and every eldest son the priest. For the days when one diverged from the other must be very remote indeed. Among all these natives, however, and especially the coast tribes, the office of high priest carries with it honours and powers that are quite equal to those belonging to the king. Very recently of course, *i.e.* within the past six years, owing to the presence of our administration at Old Calabar, Opobo, Bonny, New Calabar, Brass, Warri, and Benin City, both kings and high priests have ceased to exist, or the power at least of the latter has considerably diminished, in these particular localities. But prior to this the pontiffs or religious sovereigns, who were representing the tribal or governing deities, were men who wielded enormous influence. Indeed this sovereignty, spiritually derived as it was, and amounting as it practically did to temporal supremacy, is exemplified in a great measure in their titles alone. So, *e.g.*, we find that the high priest of the Ndem Efik, or presiding god of the departmental deities, was not only called Aubong Efik—*i.e.* King of the Efik—but was feared and respected as the first and greatest personage in the country because of the power of the god, whose chosen representative he was, that was centred, and the glory which was reflected in him—a homage which entailed the annual sacrifice of a human being. But apart from the deference that has always been shown to these priestly autocrats not only in life but in death—*i.e.* in their burial rites, and the halo of immortality that is invariably thrown around their festering and corrupted corpses, as well as in the pre-eminently prohibitive powers conferred on them over certain selected properties, and in the sanctuary of protection that they are able to offer to the outcast and condemned—it is most of all in the titles of master, owner, and governor, which originally were assumed consciously for their gods, but at the same time unconsciously for themselves, that the true exposi-

tion of their power is demonstrated. For it is, as we saw in Part II., in this patriarchal or personal feature, this sense or instinct of possession and proprietorship, that the whole social system—spiritual and human—of these, as of all natural people, rests, as on a foundation, the origin and entire base of which is nature. Let us take, as an example of the whole, Yor Obulo, who is not only chief of all the deities of the Andoni, but the governing god of the people. For in this particular instance, as the tribe is without a king, his place is filled nominally by the latter, but practically, of course, by the high priest who represents him. In this individual, and in the priesthood under his control, we find an exact counterpart to the Aubong Efik and his assistant, or in fact to any of the high priests and their assistants, who formerly ruled over affairs spiritual at Brass, Bonny, New Calabar, etc. Formed into six ranks, the duties of these priests is thus divided. The high priest only attends at the Ju-Ju house, and officiates on very special occasions only. The second priest is always in attendance on the deity, officiating not only in the matter of daily sacrifice and food offerings to the god, but performing any other service relating to individual or special sacrifices. The third priest is merely an assistant to the second. The fourth is the Drummer and Proclaimer; the fifth, the Ivory Horn Blower; and the sixth is only employed on any public occasion to parade the town, which he does carrying a tortoise-shell in his left hand and a small wand in his right, with which he beats the former as he announces in a loud voice the might and power of Yor Obulo, the divine ruler and governor of the country. This only occurs on the special and grand occasions of annual festivals, when greater ceremony is employed, in which all the priests take part, forming a procession for the purpose, which is always headed by the high priest. One of the principal of these is that of the sacrifice of bullocks which is annually made to Yor Obulo, every large town contributing one of these animals, and the smaller towns manillas, in proportion to their size.

With regard to these and other contributions which are levied throughout the year, they are taken charge of by the

high priest, who devotes a certain portion of the offerings to a general entertainment of the chiefs and people, who gather from all the different towns of the country to the principal town, in which the high priest always resides; while the balance is held in reserve to be used when required—manillas, cowries, and all trade goods, such as cloth, gin, tobacco, powder, etc., being stored up, while the cattle are allowed to run loose in the town and adjacent bush. These, of course, as pointed out in Section IV., are regarded as sacred, and no one dare wound or even molest them; indeed, the penalty of death is exacted on any offender who touches or in any way interferes with anything in or belonging to the Ju-Ju house or priests.

All contributions, in fact, whether regular or irregular, are formed into a kind of public fund, under the management of the head chiefs, and reserved exclusively for the maintenance of the first and second priests, who are on no account whatsoever allowed to work. A certain proportion, however, is utilised for palavers concerning the general community, or towards public expenses that may be incurred; but with regard to all private consultations and offices, the priests reserve to themselves the right of retaining all fees and offerings.

But to see the priestcraft in its entirety, and on a much larger and more extensive scale, as befitting a people who, prior to the advent of the British Government, were of a warlike disposition, we must go to Nembe. Here the great high priest only attends in the Ju-Ju house, and to Ogidiga, also, if he thinks it necessary, to any of the lesser deities, during any special or annual ceremony; but as soon as these are over, he is obliged to retire into the privacy of private life, where he surrounds himself not only with a halo, but with an odour of sanctity. As among the Andoni and other tribes, it is upon the second priest that the bulk of the ordinary work falls. This functionary, called Osun, is bound to hail from Kula, a town belonging to the New Calabar section, and, in addition to his being the chief assistant, he also holds the special office of Presser of the Head. Supporting him, the following are always in attend-

ance upon his spiritual highness the great high priest, and to each is accorded a special function; the first of these is Opiapialabo, the Fighter, on whom is conferred the charge of his person. Next is Okonalabo, the Singer; third, Agbogrualabo, the Thrower and Keeper of the Head, and the Killer of Women who commit adultery; fourth, Okurubenkerebiobele, the Butcher, *i.e.* the Shaver and Skinner of the Head; fifth, Oyemabinalabo, the Killer; sixth, Osi, the Licker of the Blood; and seventh, Oduminawoi, the Horn Blower.

From the entire constitution of this priestly craft it is evident that cannibalism not only had, but still has, a spiritual or sacrificial significance; and that, in other words, however this may have degenerated in principle, it was originally a religious and an absolutely indispensable sacrament. Indeed, to follow out the conception of natural man, it is only possible to do so on and along his own lines of belief in the supremacy of the spiritual. For this at once explains why it is that the head of the enemy or captive becomes a sacred emblem, and why the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood is believed to render the victory over him final and complete, giving to the conqueror as it does, in this way only, entire and absolute satisfaction from every standpoint, including that of revenge.

One peculiarly significant feature in connection with the matter, bearing out the supposed divine nature of the high priest, is the fact that he is not allowed to eat human flesh; and this divinity, apart from other considerations, is to be seen in the Ibo names for priest and high priest, the former being Ukotsuku, *i.e.* Uko, feet, and Tsuku, god; the latter, Issi Ukotsuku, or head feet of god.

As an invariable rule, these dignitaries become rich men, for the fees they get are sometimes very considerable. For example, it is practically an annual occurrence among the Andoni, who, it may be remembered, are a small tribe that exist solely by fishing, to invoke the aid of their controlling deity for a prosperous season, on which occasion value to the amount of several thousands of manillas—four hundred averaging approximately one pound sterling—is handed in



by the various towns. This is nothing exceptional. On the contrary, it occurs regularly in every trading, fishing, or farming community in the Delta. In New Calabar, for instance, we find that the destinies of these keen and pushing traders is presided over by Awomakaso—a god who, although he is only symbolised by a plain wooden emblem, is extremely fastidious with regard to the temple in which he resides. For this has to be built in one day, and if by any chance it is not finished within this time, it is pulled down and rebuilt on the fourth day. His affairs are, as usual, delegated to a human and priestly representative, so that it is not in the least surprising to find that Awomakaso is in no sense a temperance advocate; on the contrary, that he is in every sense a believer in the efficacy of spirits, and desires that a bottle—preference being given to rum—should be presented to him on the eighth, or last day of the week, which answers to the Sabbath. Yet this exceedingly moderate potentate is satisfied by one annual food offering, and a special festival which is held only every three years. But this weekly tribute is merely an infinitesimal fraction of the yearly revenue which is gathered in by the high priest and his assistants. For it is in the troubles and misfortunes, in the pains, aches, bodily and mental ailments and infirmities of his blindly foolish devotees that the god reaps a golden harvest. For the benevolent and all potent Awomakaso, like all these personal gods, has the reputation of being a just and compassionate being, who out of heartfelt sympathy and compassion for the distressed and diseased would administer to the mind and body with a view to healing their sorrows and curing their wounds.

High priests, and priests such as have been described, are in existence in every town in the Delta, but under other names, titles, and emblems, so that it is but vain and needless repetition to describe any more of them. For they are all alike full of compassion and sorrow for their worshippers, yet natural—*i.e.* human to the very core—levying tribute on them all the same, despite the finer feelings which they profess. So, without an effort and with an ease that is all the more effective because it is unconscious, they conceal the devilish



subtleties of their craft in a natural yet studied simplicity at the same time that they endeavour to salve that conscious and reflexive instinct that is either a development of, or affiliated with, the faculty of reason which we call conscience, by throwing the whole blame of the matter upon the spiritual element, whose exacting demands, according to their belief, are bound to be satisfied, whether they will or no, by the inevitable sacrifice of the substantial. As are the priests, so are the gods.

## CHAPTER II

### THE GODS OF THE PRIESTS AND PEOPLE

IN spite of number and variety, and notwithstanding the difference in names, titles, and emblems, the main ancestral principles of their belief and the various functions of the countless deities remain the same. It is this salient feature of "oneness" that I wish to impress upon the reader, and it is in consequence of it and with this particular object that the following chapter has been written. Let us now make an examination of a few more personal deities.

A curiously interesting if not instructive specimen of these anthropomorphic productions from the civilised standpoint, yet a perfectly natural god in the native estimation, is Ukwu, which, literally translated, means Foot, a very high deity among the Okah community of the Ibo, in whose honour a great festival is annually held at the end of the native year. The inhabitants of this district have, it appears, quite a reputation as blacksmiths, and travel all over that portion of the Ibo country which is contiguous to the Niger, as well as in the Ijo, Oru, and Brass territories, practically dividing the Delta with the Nkwerri, another Ibo clan of smiths, who take the eastern division. According to Okah customs, these journeymen mechanics are obliged to return to their native district in order to be present at the ceremony in question, the penalty for absence being banishment, which in case of the first offence is rescinded on payment of a fine of ten kegs of powder, or fifteen kegs in the event of two years' absence. After this the sentence of expatriation is insisted on as final.

That Ukwu, as being the protector or governor of the community, and, so to speak, the foot of the supreme god, in the first place derived his name accordingly, and exactly on the same personal principle as did Ukotsuku the priest, is quite evident. Further, it is also clear that this name has been a comparatively modern selection, or, what is even more probable, an adaptation that has been made to fit in with the development of the people into a community of blacksmiths. And the penalty inflicted for absence and the restriction placed upon absentees are objectively and legitimately severe in order to preserve intact the interests of the clan at large. So that the fines imposed are not so much the work of priestly greed and craftiness as due to the co-operative system of mutual protection that prevails throughout the entire country, which is based and formulated on the patriarchal or ancestral system.

Thus it is that the deity in question, not only emblematically but in actual earnest, puts his foot down, and so secures the presence and maintains the discipline of his followers. For to become a pariah in the flesh carries with it the infinitely greater punishment of spiritual extradition. So it is, as we have seen in Part II., that a stranger in a community, even although he belongs to the same tribe and speaks the same language, can never obtain a footing in the family or communal circle that has adopted him, but remains entirely outside the ancestral pale. So that no native, unless he is forced into exile, will knowingly condemn himself to spiritual disembodiment, which, according to his belief, is what expatriation amounts to.

Besides Ukwu there is a goddess called Agbala, *i.e.* a full-grown woman, sometimes with two or three children, who is looked on with the greatest esteem and regard among the Okah people as a doctor possessing the estimable virtue and merit of a healer. In consequence of this, families in which there has been undue mortality among the children always make a point of patronising her, in the hope of checking the ravages of the death messenger; because, although the mortality may not be checked through the adoption of her remedies and methods, and in spite of the fact that success by no means crowns

even the majority of her efforts, the popular faith in her and the like goddesses in other communities is never shaken, but still continues as firm as ever. Another virtue which appertains to Agbala is her power of divination, so that if even a stranger presents himself for the first time at her shrine, she addresses him through her priests by his name, as if she was quite familiar with him.

It is, comparatively speaking, a big jump from the country of the Okah to that of the Ogbayan, but Iyanabo, the ruling god of the latter, is worth the exertion; for he has a personality, however low it may be in the scale of civilisation, a study of which will repay the student. First of all, then—a fact, by the way, that is deserving of notice—he is a god whom the people acknowledge to have been sent to them by the Omo-Tsuku, or children of God. Apart from this suggestive fact, Iyanabo—our master—as his name implies, resides in a Ju-Ju house in the bush, the exact locality of which is a secret that is known only to the priests, and access to which is forbidden under penalty of death. Living in the same bush is an animal called Orunama, described to be like a dog, which, as being sacred to the god—his emblem presumably, for this is a matter that is also a mystery—is not permitted to be killed. More than this, it is entitled to receive the same burial rites as a chief in the event of its dying or being slain by mistake—a fact which, as pointed out in the fifth chapter of the last section, speaks for itself as being the ancestral or tribal emblem.

Unlike Iyanabo, and, indeed, the generality of these Delta deities, in this one specific instance, Mbari is a god who, in addition to the ordinary emblem by which he is known to the people, is further known to them by the selection of a certain number of human beings, whom he takes under his especial care and attention, as symbolical of himself. Common to the Ibo clans of Ohuhu, Orata, and Omumma, Mbari, through the priest in charge, is in the habit of selecting a number of nice-looking and well-formed young men and maidens with whom he wishes to keep friends, and on whom he confers special favours. Supported by the community, they are obliged to live a secluded indoor life in

huts that are set apart for their use and occupation in the immediate vicinity of the Ju-Ju house, to keep themselves perfectly clean in their persons, and to rub camwood dye on their bodies and heads every day; the termination of a year's seclusion such as this being always signalised by the organisation of a grand festival, which is renewed annually.

Inside the Ju-Ju houses that in these particular localities are dedicated to this human but peculiarly sympathetic deity, are various and numerous clay images of human beings, beasts of different kinds, snakes, leopards, the moon, stars, and the rainbow. Further, the walls are ornamented with the cheap hardware plates of commerce that are brought to them by New Calabar and Aro middlemen in return for produce. These are let into the walls along with cowries, and arranged with a not inartistic style in rude designs and patterns.

A curious and, in a sense, significant feature in connection with these figures of human beings is the fact that they are made to represent the images of certain prominent or dangerous enemies whose death is religiously desired as an advantage to the community. For the theory with regard to this practice is that, in the event of a person inimical to its interests coming to the town on evil purpose bent, the bare fact of his looking on his own image—tenanted, as it presumably is, by a spirit more evil and powerful than himself—is certain to cause his death.

This idea, except for the penalty inflicted being severer, is very similar in principle to that in which Orrunu, a spirit in the form of a charm, blinds the enemies of the town over which he watches, who visit it with the object of making mischief. Indeed the use and application of it is, on the whole, except for superficial differences in the shape and matter of the medicinal emblem, not only identical but universal throughout the Delta.

It is my belief that this special dedication of human beings to certain deities is quite common to the Delta, though I did not personally come into touch with the custom in other localities, with but few exceptions. One of these was in the country at the back of the Engenni river, among people of the Ibo tribe, the god in question confining his



attentions to the care and chastity of young virgins only. That the custom is more or less universal in West Africa may be inferred from the fact that it prevails at Sherbro and Quiah—districts which lie between Sierra Leone and Liberia—in which places the girls so dedicated are called Bundu, while in Adogme and Krobbœ they are known as “sacred virgins.” Kept by the priests under strict surveillance for a period varying from two to six years, no intrusion of any kind is permitted, and every irregularity or offence is visited with a heavy fine, slavery, or formerly even with death on the part of the offending male; and at the end of the time, when certain sacred rites have been performed by the priests, they are allowed to return to their own homes.

Associated and connected with this practice, it is also customary all over Southern Nigeria—as we shall see later on—for some of the local or commercial deities either to be placed in charge of priestesses or, at least, to have them attached to their godships.

Asimingi, the deity who formerly among the Ibani was more or less paramount in the direction of evil, and whose counterpart is everywhere to be found among many of the Ibo communities as Kamallo or Ogbonuke, is a god who took a deep and personal, yet significantly enough an avaricious and sordid, interest in those of his votaries whose ambitions incited them to be claimants for the title and prerogatives of a chief or king. It was only, however, when they had gained the ear of the high priest and priestess in charge of his godship by distributing substantial presents among them and the sacerdotal inhabitants of Finima—a town that was regarded as sacred through the presence of the god—that the claimants eventually prospered in their suits or attained the objects of their ambition. Indeed it was only by means of considerable sacrificial concessions and a specially big annual feast, lasting four days, to this powerful dispenser of evil, that the Ibani were able to obtain such prosperity as either awaited them or that was their just due in the ordinary course of events. One other trifling matter in connection with Asimingi was that every eighth day the high priest was obliged to walk round Finima, and any woman meeting him

unexpectedly on such an occasion was obliged to pay a fine in order to purify herself, because she had been looked upon by him.

Needless to remark that this practice of promotion by purchase irrespective of rank, tribe, or locality is prevalent throughout the Delta, and that the priesthood have their intrusive fingers in every pie of temporal making, although the members of mutual protection societies, such as the Okonko, the Epe, the Idion, the Egbo, etc., take good care, no doubt, to divide the profits with them.

Another interesting study is Nkwu Abasi, the god said to have come from the Big Water, far away, who rules over the destinies of the Akwete people. He is symbolised by a stone in a small stream close to their town, and the law with regard to the emblem is that no slave or woman who has been the mother of twins is permitted to see or even to approach in near proximity to him. In addition to this, the strictest prohibition is placed on sheep, cows, and native coco-yams, which are neither eaten nor even allowed into the town.

Once a year, immediately prior to the annual ceremony, the priest in charge of Nkwu Abasi is presented with a ball made out of mashed yams, in which several fish-bones have been inserted. This he is obliged to swallow as a guarantee, or rather proof, of his good faith and honesty of purpose. For the performance of this act becomes at once a justification to the people for all sacrifices so offered, as well as a propitious omen that every prophecy made by the priest in connection with the former are certain of fulfilment. In all questions that arise between the priests and the people, the former, for their own satisfaction and in order to put the value and sincerity of their priestly taxes and levies to the test, are only too willing to undergo some form or other of a not over severe ordeal. For priestcraft and plausibility—*i.e.* the art of convincing by shallow pretexts or of blinding the emotional mentality of the masses by means of mere deceptive tricks or dodges—are synonymous terms, or rather the latter, in consonance with the uneven principles of an art that is bound to be duplex, is essential to the former. Indeed,

without plausibility the priest, like the fish out of water, is utterly and entirely helpless.

Second in importance to Nkwu Abasi is Ogu, also a god of note and eminence, whose emblem is a tree of that name, underneath which a small shrine is usually built, in which an earthenware pot, filled with earth that has been gathered from around the base, is placed. As befitting a deity of protection, Ogu, in this particular instance, takes a special interest in the individual affairs of every person who approaches him with promises or—as these in reality amount to—vows in relation to their own personal concerns, but most of all in the direction of disputation and litigation with others; the prevention of any or all evil events, difficulties, entanglements, or dangers that may be due or forthcoming being his peculiar office and department.

With regard to domestic affairs, but particularly to the pregnancy of the women of Akwete, Ogu is the special god who watches over them and ensures a safe and sound delivery. In the same way, it is a general custom among all these natives, in every community and family, to consult and appease the household god of preservation. For, as I have already pointed out, maternity is regarded as a sacred matter, connected as it is in some mysterious way in their minds with the generative principle of the Supreme Generator. So that women when in this condition are more than interesting, and the children borne by them, animated as they are by the spirits of ancestors, are gifts from the gods and valued accordingly. Indeed there is a double value of spirit and substance—as there is in sacrifice, and in fact in human existence—placed on each child that, like earth veneration and personal adoration, is practically inexplicable to the European unless he understands, as I have learned to do, the unique psychology of the underlying motives that are peculiar to all natural people.

In keeping with accepted beliefs, it is usual for women, previous to their confinement, to supplicate the mother goddess of the household or community; and as soon as the suppliant, armed with manillas or cowries to the value of five shillings, also a sacrificial fowl, presents herself before

the deity, the priest, who is there to receive her, throws some water on the ground, and, taking some wet mud from the spot, he rubs it over her abdomen as well as on her forehead. This done, he invokes the aid of the goddess in order to protect the life of the woman, but more especially at the time of her confinement, so that she may be safely delivered.

To mark the difference between the maid and the mother, and to show the importance of the latter in their eyes, two customs, or rather fashions, for they apply only to the dress of females, that are generally in vogue are deserving of notice. The first of these, prevalent among the coast and other tribes, who cover their bodies either entirely or partially, is the discarding of the fashion of tying, *i.e.* wearing cloth, in the manner Egenebite that is prescribed for virgins only, and the adoption of the style called Beebite by the Ibani, which is worn by mothers. To further distinguish between a married woman who has had no offspring and a mother, the latter only is allowed to wear a cloth, which is dyed yellow and called Awumiabite. This privilege is, however, conceded to women who have never conceived when they have been many years married, but only as a rule to women of influence and utility.

Indeed this question of the consignment of women to the care of one particular deity is to be seen in the most trivial matters, and the regulations on the subject are everywhere very strict. In consequence of this, even after confinement the greatest care is taken of the mother and infant. Washed first of all with hot water, palm oil—which is considered to be medicinal in its effects—is rubbed all over the abdomen and applied to the wounded parts, and the former is then bound very tight with a cloth by the old women midwives. A big fire is kept in the room, and the mother is fed three times a day, plenty of palm oil and pepper being put into her food. Besides this, she is washed three times a day, and spirit or palm wine, fortified by alligator pepper, is administered internally, in the belief that it warms and regulates the womb. Further, a woman nursing a child—also during gestation—is forbidden to cohabit with her husband. If in the former case, however, she transgresses the law with some other man and becomes pregnant, she is



held responsible for the life of her lawful child; while punishment is inflicted on her paramour in proportion to the rank of the woman, it being much heavier in the case of a chief's wife, and the offence being altogether regarded as extremely heinous.

As in those which have been pointed out, so practically in all matters connected with domestic economy, everything is placed in the hands of the household or communal gods. It is not surprising, therefore, that matrimony, as befitting a cause which must lead to the effect that is above all desired, is regarded as an affair of some importance, and not, as the European imagines it is, in an absolutely cheap and insignificant sense. For before a man can consummate his marriage with a virgin, he and the prospective bride are both obliged to perform a ceremony in the presence of the household god of preservation. This custom, known as *Turu Jua* among the Ibani, is performed before *So*; the offering on this occasion being chalk, eggs, yams, palm wine, spirits, a special kind of shiny-nosed fish called *Ndah*, and a compound made up of mashed yams and ripe plantains. This oblation, the meat and drink more especially, is offered to the god, *i.e.* placed in front of his emblem, by the bridegroom himself, who in serving him beseeches *So* to confer health, wealth, and prosperity on all the members of the household, and particularly to defend them from all harm and evil. The virgin, who has now become a bride, is then marked by the sacred chalk with a stripe that extends from the left shoulder down the whole length of the arm to the tips of her fingers, and the husband as well as the head of the house, who must be present, receive a similar mark on the right side. A big play, which consists of the usual feasting, singing, and dancing, and that lasts all day and night, then terminates the proceedings and the ceremony.

Two stakes about four feet in length, with pointed ends, cut specially from the tree *Odiri*—no other kind being permitted—are placed horizontally on the ground in a corner of the bridegroom's house by the family priest. The following ritual is then observed. The bride and bridegroom are obliged to sit side by side with their feet placed on the



two stakes. The priest now kills a goat and sprinkles the warm blood on their feet and on the sticks. While he is doing so he pronounces them man and wife, and the marriage so binding that only death can dissolve it, and ends up with the usual benediction for material prosperity. The husband, when this is over, at once rises and drives the stakes into the ground with a stone or a rude mallet, and there they must remain until they rot and fall to pieces. For no one dare take them out. Thus it is that, in accordance with their laws, wherever the wife may subsequently go or whatever she may do, and no matter how many children she may beget by any one other than her husband, all of them, including herself, belong to him and are in fact his property. So that he can legitimately demand that they should be given up to him. More than this. When the wife dies, only the husband and no one else is entitled to perform the sacred and all essential funeral rites. The two stakes in question are known as Tsi, and no unmarried man dare allow them to enter his house. The name Tsi (*v.* Appendix) not only implies the great antiquity of the marriage rite, but demonstrates the supposed sanctity of its origin.

An oath is a matter so sacred that, just as the keeping of it brings its own reward, the breaking of it involves its own punishment. In connection with the matter it is customary to place a time-limit on the vow, so that, should the votary die within this period, the cause of his death is attributed to the fact that he had committed perjury; and it is usual on such an occasion for everything belonging to the deceased to become forfeit to the priest in charge. Should his family, however, fail to deliver them, they fall under the ban of Ogu's displeasure—or whoever the protecting god of the community may happen to be—and are threatened with his vengeance. If, on the contrary, he survives, and there be any disputant in the matter on whose account the vow has been taken, the latter is obliged to make redress to the former in the following manner: to present him with the value of a slave, either in person or in goods, also with one trade shirt, one piece of cloth, one keg of powder, one hat, one goat, one fowl, besides yams, pepper, oil, salt, spirits, palm wine, and other articles. The

powder, it will be observed, is for the purpose of firing a salute, as an expression of joy and an announcement made in honour of the god for giving him the victory, just as the animals and food are reserved for sacrifice, *i.e.* to be eaten, and the spirits and palm wine are meant to feast and make merry with; this demonstration of uproarious and unconfined mirth—subsequent, of course, to the oblation—being in native estimation the sincerest, as it is the most natural, form of human adoration.

The principle of swearing on the emblem of a deity is not, of course, confined to Ogu, Nkwu Abasi, or any one god in particular; and it is usual among those tribes who are associated with water and accustomed to use canoes, that when the votary happens to be drowned, his property, including even his paddles, are taken possession of by the deity involved. For, as these people are firm believers in design, the question of accident is never taken into consideration.

The likeness between Ogu of the Ndoke people and Ewitaraba of the Andoni, despite their different names and emblems, will have long since been detected as being the arbitrators of their respective communities, who decide the merits of every case that is laid before them. Indeed, a careful examination of the various household and communal deities of the different tribes reveals the fact that, except for a very superficial difference in names and perhaps in formulas, such, *e.g.*, as in votive or other sacrificial offerings or in articles that are tabu, the gods and their respective functions are identical.

I have already, I trust, made it quite clear, or at least have endeavoured to explain, that this system of religion is based fundamentally—that is, purely and entirely—on the close and naturally inseparable ties and associations of family or ancestral relationship, which is regarded by these natives as a natural order, direct from the Supreme God. In other words, that the essential and governing principle is, on the one hand, the fatherhood of the governing and fertilising god, and on the other, the motherhood of the producing and nourishing goddess, his co-operator or spouse, and a third

deity—the son—as the result of their co-operation. Therefore, just as we saw in Chapter IX. of the last section that, among the Ibani, Adum was the father god, Okoba the mother god, and Eberebo the son god, so in the Ju-Ju houses of every community in the Delta the same trio are to be seen under their own local cognomens. But for the purpose of the book this matter has been already sufficiently explained, so that, beyond making an examination of the household and departmental deities and the respective functions attaching to them, it will be quite unnecessary to make any further inquiries.

Selecting those of Onitsha as an illustration equally and thoroughly typical of the entire pantheon of any one individual community or tribe, as of all the communities and tribes in the Delta, we find, first of all, that Ani, symbolised by a clay figure which stands underneath a small tree called Egboor Ogibisi, and Olinri, the mother of all, the nourisher of her children, and the protector of her people from all evil, represented by some pieces of rock on the banks of the Niger river, as the original ancestral gods of this clan, are responsible for a great number of other deities belonging to the various towns and families into which it is divided. Thus, *e.g.*, Aze, emblemised by a clay image holding a horn, which stands in a Ju-Ju house that was built over the grave of an influential descendant of Tsimba the King, is the goddess of the villages of Ogbe, Ozara, and Umaroh.

Ogwugwa, whose emblem or mud image, standing in a Ju-Ju house and which includes a tree, is the deity of Ogboli; and Uto, whose spirit is contained in two earthen pots, which are also kept in a temple, is that of Odojile.

At Isiokme, Edemili, an agricultural god—whom we met in Chapter XII. of the last section as a rain-maker or withhold—resides in a stone and a piece of metal which are deposited in a Ju-Ju house that is built inside a sacred grove.

In the towns of Umasere and Iyawu the guardian deities are Uto and Otumoye—the latter a sacred stream; the former symbolised by a clay figure in a temple, who has forbidden his people to drum on all narrow-necked pots.

At Obikpu is Neghagu, a goddess, the daughter of a former chief, who had been held in great esteem for her power and

virtue, and who now in the spirit watches over her people as she reposes, in the form of a mud image, in a Ju-Ju house. Again, Ojedi, the god of Umudei, also represented by a mud figure, is dedicated to a former big woman of that place.

Ani, the ancestral shadow of Ogbe-abri, is a tree god. Associated with him, however, are certain family gods of increase, as the natives speak of them, named Omumu, Meledem, Okpukpoku, and Okikiria, who undoubtedly represent the adoration of the procreative principle—as, for the matter of that, does the entire system of ancestral adoration, based as it is on the co-operation of the male and female energies. In addition to these is Okpulukpu, a carved wooden image, the god of a chief or head of a house, in which are deposited all his offerings—that is, reserved only for the exclusive worship of such. So much so that even the eldest son or daughter is not permitted to touch it during the father's lifetime.

From these illustrations of the Delta system it is evident that the evolution of the gods of a community is synchronous with the actual development of the community itself. Each fresh extension or foundation of a new family from the parent stock, while still adhering to the original father, mother, and son gods, selects its own special family deity, as typical of it being the offspring, or symbolising the fact of its relationship and the headship of its own branch. Thus it is that among the Igbo or Ibo proper, the Nri—a fact we have more than once seen—as the parent stock of the tribe, are considered sacred in the eyes of all the other clans who have derived their origin from them, although at the present day their interests in social, commercial, and other ways are far removed. It is, as has already been remarked in Part I., in this specific fact, still further in the fact that sociologically all the different tribes of the Delta are practically identical, that the entire interest and instruction of this work centre. For in following up the links that connect the deities of one household or community to those of another we are but tracing out the history of the people themselves; because if we but unearth these ghostly-cum-material records we find everywhere, as we have found here, that the god of each household or town is



but the emblem of some former ancestor, who in turn was the son or daughter of another patriarch who, after departing to spiritland, had been deified by their families; and so on, until, as in the case of the Nri and the Ibo, we arrive at the parent stock of the tribe or race, the emblem in each instance, whatever it be, being merely the material reminder or evidence to the family of his having at one time existed as a human being in their midst, just as now he watches over their interests in the spirit.

It is, in fact, in this system of the deification of certain commanding personalities—personalities, be it remembered, who at one time had been in their own persons the arbiters of so many human destinies—that it is possible to trace backwards the evolution of their entire religious system. For in accordance with the rules that oblige every man or woman to deify and honour father and mother after their corporeal decease, and then to keep these particular gods as far back as to the sixth generation, many of these deifications are necessarily of modern growth. What is more, they at once account for the countless numbers of gods in existence. Yet it is not so much in these numerous deifications as in their communal and departmental deities that the ancestral genealogy is traceable. For, subject to fluctuation, variation, and compound multiplication as the former have been through a long flight of ages, the latter, as the accepted gods of each succeeding generation, have been handed down from father to son, without change of any kind, except those of emblem and of name, due principally, as we have seen, to change of locality and conditions. In spite of this, however, it is from and through the deified parents and personalities that the communal and departmental gods can be traced. For there can be no doubt about it, that it was through them that the god-idea originally evolved, and it was in this way that the origin of the human ancestors, connected and associated as they were with the gods, was unconsciously traced back to the Supreme Generator or Creator.

1. The first of the gods who at some very remote period have been ancestors subsequently deified—all still belonging to Onitsha—is Ani-ezi. He is not only the protecting god of the community but the punisher of all evil-doers, and the first



as representing the best interests of a household or community. Although in this case, *e.g.*, the emblem is only a mud figure, which always stands in the centre of the house, it is interesting to know that Ani, as the earth, is typical of the earth god, and that Ani-ezi, interpreted literally, means "the meeting-place of the mud with which any house has been built."

Apart from these two essential and paramount characteristics, there is another extremely potential feature connected with this deity. For it is by touching, or in some cases breaking, the emblem—or, as it is called in Efik, the Usan—of the household god of protection belonging to some big patriarch or chief that a slave or dependant belonging to some other person is able to obtain, or in fact to compel, justice. For in this way he places his person under the protection of the god himself, and no man who has the smallest regard for his own well-being as well as that of his house would dare to incur the displeasure and most probably the wrath of his god. So that, will he nill he, he is obliged to see the refugee out of his trouble by redeeming or otherwise helping him.

2. Urai, the Preventer, is another household god, whose emblem is a large pot of medicine, and whose particular line of business is to stave off or prevent misfortune from falling on the family.

3. Ikenga, symbolised by the wooden figure of a man with two horns, the god of virtue and fortune, and giver of strength and of all good things to those who have a house, is the daily provider of food, and the god of good actions.

4. Ogbonuke, on the contrary, although he represents the interests of all men in the prime of life, who by the way are obliged to sacrifice to him as often as they are directed by the priests or doctors, is the god of bad actions—corresponding to the devil of theology.

5. Ofo, represented by a branch of the tree Ofo, is god of justice and of right, and is appealed to by those who, having a grievance, consider that right is on their side, or, in fact, that they are altogether in the right.

6. Osi—meaning literally a tree—an enlarged form of Ofo, is a god who is reserved exclusively for chiefs of the first rank and upwards. Every ordinary person, however, has the

Osisi which belonged to his ancestors, and a man is of course permitted to keep this after he has become a chief.

7. Ifejioku, the god of crops, who is represented by a yam, or even piece of yam, or by some mud that has been brought from the farm, which is kept in the house, makes all seed to grow and the earth to become fruitful.

8. In addition to these, the women of the household also keep for their specific use and purpose two deities, the first of whom is Ekwu, the kitchen god, who resides in a mud image, and the second, also an emblem of mud, is Umu-ada, who represents the interests of all the women of the house or village—otherwise “the collection of the spirits of departed females.”

9. But, although the last place has been reserved for him, Tsi, the Supreme God or Creator of all these other gods, and of everything in existence, is in reality first, and, as it were, apart in every sense, not only as being the Maker, who has made and fertilised all things above and below, therefore the Owner and Master thereof, but also because he is a Being who is all goodness, although he is at the same time all powerful and capable of inflicting death and punishment. But not of evil mind, because, apart even from all considerations of right and wrong, the very fact of the infallibility of his position, invulnerable and unassailable as it is, identical in fact as it is with that of the father in the flesh—from which, of course, the whole idea originally emanated—is in itself sufficient to guarantee the question of right unquestionable, and to prevent that of wrong unthinkable from being in any way connected with his supreme and commanding personality. For his word is law, and his law as Maker, Owner, and Master is not only just and irrevocable, but, as we have recently seen, it is unquestionable and even unthinkable. Indeed, as I have endeavoured to explain in Part II., it is but a matter of an open mind, or honesty of purpose, more even than of keenness of intellectual perception, that enables us to detect the crude philosophy of these natural people in the meaning of words such as those, for example, which represent “life,” “being,” or “growth”—all growth, and all that tends to exist, be, or live, being in their estimation considered synonymous with all that is

good and beautiful, *i.e.* substantial—as having a material embodiment and a soul or spirit essence, and useful because it can be materially utilised; while all that makes for decay, dissolution, and death, as opposed to development, is on the wrong side of the balance—that is, bad.

## CHAPTER III

### AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ATTRIBUTES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE GODS

LET us now make an investigation of some of the most salient features that have occurred to us with respect to the attributes and functions of the various deities who manage and control the domestic and communal affairs of these natives, referring to them in the order in which they exactly occur.

Putting aside for the present all considerations as to the palpable and unmistakable humanity of the entire arrangement, we are all the same struck by three points which stand out prominently from all the rest. These are :—

1. The extraordinary resemblance of the spiritual to the mundane, and more specifically of the household and communal gods to a council of elders.

2. The fact that the position of the Creator is unique, apart, and not so much utterly independent of them as having no connection with them whatsoever, with regard at least to the administration of human affairs.

3. Yet, notwithstanding this, the fact that there is a distinct association, if not relationship, existing that connects the lowest with the highest and the highest with the lowest.

These points have very frequently been alluded to as well as examined in different sections of this book, so that it is not in the least necessary to dilate further upon them. It would be as well, however, for the reader to bear them in mind. With regard to the question of God in His capacity of a dealer out or dispenser of death and punishment—*i.e.* what in natural philosophy is the reverse of good, or not good—it is as well to

recognise that He is placed by the people themselves on a pinnacle of goodness or moral supremacy above the communal and household deities, who are altogether on the lower plane of a morality which, dual as it is, returns an equivalent for that which is meted out, either in the direction of good or evil—yet not merely or so much because he is their Creator as because he is Supreme, and like the king can do no wrong.

So it is, because they regard God, whose emblem is the sky, as the male or fertilising energy and origiator of all nature, that they have detached Him from the personal and raised Him to an eminence which is as unique as it is supreme. And, similarly, it is because the earth is the female energy, or conceiver of all that is in being, that they have a reverence for their land which is inexplicable to the European.

In connection, therefore, with the respective positions of and the relationship existing between the primary God and the secondary deities, it is quite essential that the attitude of the people towards the former should be distinctly understood. For it is in consequence of this detachment from the personal, and because of this unique supremacy alone, that, apart from the offering which is made to Him annually, it is customary only to approach Him—as has more than once been pointed out—in the last resource or extremity, when all other gods, arbitrators, advocates, mediums, and mediators have miserably failed, and then only after a succession of misfortunes which has culminated in ruin. It is not, in fact, until the supplicants have been crushed and beaten to the earth because of a recurrence of reacts against which all spiritual remedies and appliances are impotent, that they venture to appeal to the Supreme God. He is the last and final court of appeal in the same way that He is the first and greatest god.

The material and spiritual increase of the household, and in the same way of the community, is altogether regulated by the father and mother gods, who, although they fertilise, nourish, and protect their children, only do so when their children are well behaved, docile, obedient, and reverential. For when their conduct is the reverse of this—*i.e.* when it is non-ancestral, or wanting in due respect and duty to the spiritual, these gods of increase transpose themselves for the nonce



into demons of decrease, and so frequently send the messenger Death from spiritland to release or bring back the souls of the human members of the family, so that numbers of them die. In plain language, they allow the spirits of disease to play havoc among them, and so smite them hip and thigh. Yet these evil spirits of disease, the reader must recollect, are not adored as gods, nor are sacrifices made to them in this sense, but only in that of propitiation—a most tremendously significant feature, demonstrating plainly and vigorously as it does that, brutal and ignorant as the people are from a civilised standpoint, the worship of their ancestors, which, as an evolution from Nature herself, is their natural religion, is an element outside and apart from demonology. For demonology, as they believe in and practise it, is altogether an outcome of that branch of human thought and desire which has been mentally, and so to speak deliberately, concentrated on the wrong side of the social balance, and put into practice with the object of consummating the destruction of all that is even or good on the right side—in a word, the unnatural or all-destroying factor in humanity, as opposed to the natural or dual element, which, although dual, is more on the side of construction: a concept which in principle is very similar, if not identical, to that which they believe to be the motive principle of suicide, which, although a seemingly deliberate act of the person, is regarded as due to obsession on the part of a unit of that detached power of evil which they can only express by the one and single term of witchcraft.

Similarly, the god of protection is the punisher of all evil-doers—evil, more especially, with regard to the neglect of those household or communal duties and responsibilities that appertain to every member of a family in gradation from the father downwards. And it is particularly noticeable that even the stranger who is outside the ancestral pale is taken under the all-enfolding wing of this sympathetic deity. Yet, not satisfied with the mere protection of one god whose sole duty is to protect his flock, the services of another powerful spirit, in the form of a preventer, have been requisitioned.

It is, however, in the character of the next two gods—*i.e.* in the Ikengas and Ogbonukes of the country—that we are

confronted with a more subtle problem, not so much with regard to their different functions as in connection with the principles and requirements that primarily necessitated their intervention, and in a certain measure their co-operation, in the management of affairs. It is at once evident that in these two very important functionaries we are face to face with what, in a more remote period—speaking both broadly and generally, and without going into either detail or specification—appeared in the primitive philosophy of natural man as the active and dominating principle of nature, namely, the good and the bad, or, as he saw it, the growth or life and the decay or dissolution of existence. Hence it was that, as everything was then measured from a purely material or substantial standpoint, the principle of good was afterwards personified in the form of some prominent and powerful ancestor, who, supplying them, as he was believed to have done, with all that made life plentiful and prosperous, became to the household the god of virtue and fortune, the giver of all good things, and the daily provider of food. In a word, while the principle and the person represented to them the god of good actions, in a similar manner the opposite principle, also personified in the entity of some former predecessor with a reputation for harshness and severity, as they saw it almost daily in the different operations of natural elements and phenomena, had assumed, and in time occupied, the position of the god whose actions were bad. Indeed, to quote the exact words of an intelligent Ibo, addressed to me in person, they believe that there are in existence two active spirits—the one a saviour or preserver, the other a destroyer, whose sole purpose in life is to get men into trouble and difficulties. This induction is all the more evident in the attitude of the people towards this latter deity. For it is worthy of remark that Ogbonuke is not entirely one-sided with respect to the important rôle he plays. On the contrary, like Simingi or Kamallo, indeed similar to all deities of the same class in every community or tribe, he is perfectly neutral, if not actively benevolent. For, as we have seen, he represents the interests of all men in the prime of life, so long, of course, as they propitiate him. In this sense, if we are to

credit theology, he is every whit as obliging and accommodating as the arch-fiend Satan. With the proud Lucifer, however, we have nothing either to do or say. But as regards this native devil, what is most noticeable is the fact that even he is not utterly and entirely bad. For, although he is the head of the department which supplies the dangers and misfortunes, these things, first of all, are not exclusively confined to him and his myrmidons; and, secondly, with a moral complacency that is above reproach, and so long as he has received his mead of substance and of spirit, he not only withholds the evil, but allows the good to pour in upon the people without either interference or protestation on his part.

But the explanation of this, when analysed from the native aspect, is that this god, like all these departmental deities, although created by the Supreme, is all the same of ancestral origin. Because, as pointed out in Part II. and elsewhere, evil, to be utterly one-sided, must be entirely outside the ancestral pale—*i.e.* outside the powers and scope of the Creator—therefore disembodied, unnatural, and confined to sorcery. And this dread curse is not only kept off, as we saw in Chapter V., Section V., by a specific spirit medium, but also by Urai, the Preventer, as well as by the god of bad actions, if properly propitiated.

It is a difficult matter for the European, as I have so often reiterated, to understand a principle such as this unless he is able to think black, *i.e.* naturally. For these natives, dull and unintelligent as the European thinks them, are neither so dull nor so stupid as not to see which way the wind is blowing when questioned by the inquisitive white man. So that even if they do not give a direct refusal, or take the trouble to wrap up their answers in metaphor or parable, or to affect complete ignorance regarding what has been said to them, or, yet again, to shuffle out of it with the dexterity of natural simplicity and silence, they are invariably prepared to supply their questioners with precisely the exact information that they opine is required. Or, as an old Ibo chief, whose bluntness of speech, as we would call it, or, as I personally would prefer to designate it, natural simplicity, which was deeper and more subtle than it appeared on the

surface, replied, when interrogated regarding the character of a charm which he was wearing round the neck, "Why ask? Surely the white man, who knows everything, knows all about such a trifling matter without any reference to me." And this attitude exactly interprets the feelings and opinions of the great majority of them. But talk to them as if you are from one and the same nature and belong to the same humanity as they do; listen to their grievances, their sorrows, and their misfortunes, and enter into their joys, their humours, and their successes; take a human interest generally in their personal concerns, in the welfare of themselves and especially of their children, the condition and prosperity of their farms, their fishing, their hunting, and their trades; show them in a practical manner that you have a fellow-feeling for them, that your sympathy is real and sincere, and that you are in downright earnest, and can think as they do, talk as they can talk, and, above all, feel with the same pain and pleasure that they can feel, and you will have won your way into that conflicting and chaotic seat of the emotions which, for want of a better word, we call heart. Further, let them see and feel that you understand and appreciate their laws and customs, legal, social, religious, and moral; hear with patience their ancient feuds and palavers, extending backwards through many generations; act but the part of a wise and judicious mediator or arbitrator between contending factions, and then, even though you belong to an element that is outside their own ancestral circle, therefore, so to speak, devilish and inimical, you will not only get into touch with them, but will find, as I did, that these naturally shy and suspicious people will bare their hearts almost as much as it is possible to do within the prescribed limitations of that part of nature which we call human.

But to resume about the gods. It is Ofo, the chief-justice of the community, and also the diviner of crime, when no specific divining god, such as Ogba of Ogbunike, is present, who, when the good offices of human judges and mediators fail to effect a satisfactory settlement between contending litigants, is generally appealed to as the divine, therefore more discriminating and potential, arbitrator in the case. To



appreciate the exact position of this divinity, also of the principle on which law is dispensed and morality is adjudicated, it is essential that the reader should understand the entire constitution of the social system of the people themselves. This is not only necessary in this specific instance, but in every single circumstance that is connected with their existence. For this, and the social system which has grown up around it, is so entirely woven in with their religion—the latter being merely an inevitable condition and outcome of the former—that, even if they would, they cannot get away from it. For although the morality of these naturists is but a natural morality—*i.e.* the morality which has evolved from and prevails in a state of nature, therefore too brutally literal to suit the æstheticism of altruistic culture—they are, in the strict and natural sense of the word, a truly and a deeply religious people, of whom it can be said, as it has been said of the Hindus, that “they eat religiously, drink religiously, bathe religiously, dress religiously, and sin religiously.” In a few words, the religion of these natives, as I have all along endeavoured to point out, is their existence, and their existence is their religion. Yet though it is a religion of substantial practice and not of phantasmal profession and theory, the entire substance and control of it is but an offering on the part of these natural beings to the overweening vanity and egoism of their own mentality, which, however, is too blind to discriminate between the real and the unreal, or rather between the substance itself and the shadow or mental emanations that are associated with it. But as this particular phase of their philosophy, connected as it is with their morality, has been more or less explained elsewhere, it will only be necessary to point out here that the question as to right and wrong is, as an invariable rule, with certain fundamental exceptions of course, one that is purely and entirely a personal matter affecting the existence or integrity of the individual, and by no means a question that has been laid down or defined on a fixed and unalterable basis. Therefore it is that, in the event of a dispute arising between two persons, the question in dispute is always referred for settlement to a third party. Because, unless this is done, the case is never settled, and the



breach is widened to such an extent, by acts of aggression and retaliation on both sides, that it not only provokes an open rupture of the peace, but more often than not develops into war between the two communities to whom the litigants belong. For the party in the wrong only admits it when he is forced to do so through fear and under a spiritual compulsion which he believes to be stronger than the spirit forces that are at his command.

Indeed, no more practical evidence of the morality of these natives can be adduced than the fact that in the settlement of a dispute or law suit between two contending parties the selection of judges or mediators does not in any way depend on individual status or position, or in any sense on any especial qualities of integrity or honesty. Regardless of all these qualifications, the one absolutely imperative condition which is necessary in the selection of the mediators is that it should be to the mutual satisfaction of both parties; and on this being arranged the judge chosen is vested with extreme powers, so that in dealing with a case he does so entirely and absolutely according to his own views of right and wrong. Do what we may, in fact, in examining their gods and the special attributes and functions belonging to them, it is impossible to get away from the people themselves and the social system by which they are environed. For the gods are in the likeness of the priests, and the priests are but the thought-leaders of the people.

Passing on to Osi, we are at once in touch with the more immediate personal or ancestral god, who stands directly, not only for the individual interests of the patriarch and, through him, of the whole household, but who also is the direct and immediate connecting link between them and the spirit family. And, as we have seen in Chapter III., Section IV., that life in spiritland is but a reflex of the human existence, the rules about rank, title, and the order of precedence as a spiritual legacy being rigidly observed in consequence, there is no difficulty in recognising the motive that underlies the bestowal of a special spirit guardian on a person who has been promoted to the rank of chief. For the nature of these natural men is so appreciably alike in its humanity to that of

the civilised unit, that they are quite as keen to purchase the patent of nobility as any purse-proud city alderman. Superficially, however, there is just this difference, that, true to Nature, the former, unlike the latter, have neither inclination nor permission to disavow the ancestors from whom they have sprung, no matter how lowly their origin.

A combination of functions is seen among many, if not most, of the Delta gods, and is to be traced to the greater individuality of those ancestral thought-leaders who in the remote ages from deified spirits developed into administrative and departmental deities. A good example of this combination is to be seen in Ifejioku, the agricultural god of Onitsha, yet the maker and withholder of rain. It might appear strange, for instance, that with a daily provider of food, such as Ikenga, a special god should be considered necessary for the supply of crops, but the natural society of this early period found that, in spite of the god of good actions, and the daily provider of food, the crops at times went wrong, so that it became essential to place the growth and increase of them under the care of a specific god and department. Besides this, it is once more possible to see in this especial phase a distinct spiritual connection between the products of earth, as symbolised by a yam or small portion of mud from the farm, and the earth herself. So it is that any veneration which is offered direct to this deity is indirectly an offering to the great mother.

In the gods Ekwu and Umu-ada we see that even the women of a community, who, as I pointed out in Chapter IV., Section IV., are neither so despised nor so downtrodden as is generally supposed, along with their special domestic arrangements and personal interests, are specifically represented—the former by the god Ekwu, and the latter by the combination of female spirits called Umu-ada. This fact of the femininity of a god-being, who combines within her entity or embodiment the concentrated essences of so many departed women, based as it is on one of the favourite principles of their philosophy, that number necessarily implies strength and co-operation, is one which speaks for itself. For it unmistakably demonstrates that, in spite of the lesser and inferior position which has been assigned to women in the social scale, their position as indis-

pensable co-operators in the human phase of the creative scheme is not only assured, but satisfactory, and altogether compatible with the degree or form of energy that has come to them in the natural order of things. Further, it shows that it is a position in which they feel themselves capable of defending their own personal interests by means of a spiritual co-operation that is essentially typical of the productive energy. Indeed, as I have endeavoured more than once to impress upon the reader, the question of sex and sexual co-operation is, with these natives, the pre-eminent feature of the plan of Nature. And a comprehension of the psychology of their philosophy makes it quite clear that sex, as their primitive ancestors primarily regarded it, was merely the necessary and inevitable division of the oneness or unity of Nature by which the greater energy fertilised and predominated over the lesser yet equally indispensable energy, that, so to speak, receives and subsequently conceives the fruit or animating essence, which it then produces in one soul-charged or animated embodiment, as the unit or offspring of both energies.

The words implying ownership and fatherhood, which are in common use all over Southern Nigeria, are most interesting, as giving a true insight into the whole primitive idea of creation. They are, in fact, one of the unmistakable clues to the original thought of natural man, who looked on himself, not only as the production of God the Creator or First Father, but as his immediate offspring. Hence it is that the Aro call themselves "the sons of God." Hence it was that Igwe, the sky (god), came down from above, and having impregnated Ani, the earth (goddess), made her conceive man and every living thing. Hence, too, the libations and food offerings to the earth prior both to eating and drinking. So it is that the expression "father and mother," as applied to the head of a house or distinguished personage, exists everywhere. For whatever the original conception was, as it appeared to the far-off ancestors of these natives, it is obvious that, in spite of their knowledge of the two sexes or energies, primitive philosophy went back and beyond this to the one great sky father, as embracing within himself not merely these physical energies, but also the more mysterious principles of adjustment among

others of good and evil, of right and wrong, and of light and darkness.

It is quite impossible to understand the spiritual conception and the god-idea of these natives unless we possess a knowledge of that peculiarly personal system of society out of which it has evolved and developed ; and we recognise that the gods are but the shadows or spirits, so called, of mortals. They are rude but perfect pictures of the very worshippers in whose own human image they have been either kneaded out of clay or carved out of wood, the father and fertiliser supreme holding in his hands the power of life and death ; the head wife and mother, or producer of the eldest son, filling a position of great trust and reverence as the maternal nourisher ; the son in his turn as having the confidence of both, and being the mediator between them and the rest of the household ; the elders of the various branches into which this is divided, respected as they are in this capacity, occupying the position of counsellors and managers—heads of departments, in other words. Indeed, it is all so obviously human that it is difficult to understand why a misconception so stupendous should have ever prevailed with regard to it.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ANNUAL AND ANCESTRAL CEREMONIALS

IN order to get a deeper insight into the character of this spiritual family, it will now be necessary to examine the ritual and ceremonials which are regularly held in their honour.

It is customary, as a mark of esteem, gratitude, and fear to their ancestors, but especially to the protector and daily giver of food, to offer up a short prayer or petition, in addition to a certain amount of food and libations of water or liquor, in accordance with what they may happen to be drinking at the time. Besides this, a daily service in some cases, but always a weekly service, is held once every four days among the Ibo and other interior tribes, and on every eighth day among the coast natives. The principal feature of this, as indeed of all their services, consists of food and drink offerings; also of an animal sacrifice—usually a goat or a fowl, according to the means of the household. In addition to these, special services of thanksgiving and purification—the latter very similar to the Jewish, also to the Roman, lustrations—are invariably organised in connection, more especially, with marriage rites, the birth of children—especially of twins—the pregnancy and menstruation of women, the casting out of spirits, combating disease, defilement of the person or land by the committal of certain crimes against ancestral authority (murder and theft, for example), the dedication to the gods of children, also of certain animals, to invoke the ancestral blessing on the departure from and the return to the household of all members of importance who have gone on a journey either by land or water—to commemorate, in fact, all such domestic events or occur-



rences as are associated with the ordinary routine of a household.

But while these are, so to speak, private functions, or at least confined to the members and precincts of the household, it is also customary to celebrate annually certain public festivals to the supreme and departmental gods, in which the entire community participate. Of these there are seven notable feasts, which are regularly observed once a year, at stated periods, by all the various communities throughout Southern Nigeria, and as they are established on the same basis, and are practically identical in every feature, I have once more selected those of Onitsha as an excellent illustration of the rest, as they were celebrated prior to the establishment of a civilised administration.

These ceremonies, given below in the order in which they occur, are as follows:—

1. *Ajatsi* or *Ajaci*.—Sacrifices and adoration to the great spirit or creator.

This, which is the first feast in the year, as it is in an ethical sense the first in importance, is always made in anticipation of the new crop, to ensure that it is good. On this occasion sacrifices of thanksgiving and propitiation are made to Tsi or Ci, the creator god, to thank him for blessings past and present, and to obtain his favour and protection during the ensuing year.

2. *Umato*.—Communion of first-fruits.

This is a festival to the household gods, and, properly speaking, a celebration which is meant to show the good-will that is existing between all the various households of a community. The king is always the first person to initiate it, which he does by inviting the chiefs to a feast in his house. The chiefs then follow suit, according to their respective ranks, and finally the people entertain among themselves. The occasion, as being connected with the ancestral or more personal element of their existence—the element, moreover, of that retribution which is so much feared—is naturally regarded as one of great moment. It is in consequence exceedingly popular, and all classes and sexes join in it with great enthusiasm and fervour. This is done not so much as an

outburst of spontaneous joy, as an expression of their deepest feelings and of their inmost consciousness, to ensure, in fact, among the various units of the community that unification and integrity of interests which is essential to the welfare and prosperity of the community as a whole. And as a material expression of this unanimity the givers of the feast in each case always expect the assistance of all their female relatives in preparing the food. On this occasion, as on the former, a meat offering is always presented to all the tutelary deities.

3. *Owu-Waji* or *Owune-Aji*.—A communion of the new yam.

On the first day of this festival animal sacrifices are made to the gods of the community. This ceremony is performed between two poles outside the precincts of every household by all the principal elders, and in the presence of all the members. A preparation of certain herbs called unedi, with which pieces of roast yam are mixed, is then administered to the heads of the different households, and at each mouthful of the mixture the onlookers who are standing round give a loud shout, so as to indicate to the gods the faithful observance on the part of their father regarding the divine instructions relative to the prohibition placed on the eating of new yams. Regarded as a season of great rejoicing and mirth, this sacrament is likewise held in great esteem as a thanksgiving offering for the new crop of yams, in which the entire community participates, more particularly so because of the gratifying prospect of a greater abundance of food. It is, in fact, a harvest festival. The young men, according to custom, are the first who are obliged to eat of the new yam. Chiefs of the sixth or lowest rank follow them, and so the feast is continued on the ascending social scale until it comes to the king's turn, who on this occasion closes the ceremony, as in Umato he was the first to open it.

It is usual, however, for the king to give a month's notice before the ceremony can take place, and in all communities, such as Onitsha, in which several smaller towns or villages are incorporated, the new yam is first of all eaten by the smallest, and so on according to size up to the principal or royal town, which comes last on the roster, the doctors,

diviners, and priestcraft generally preceding it as distinct and constituted bodies in themselves. The idea of this is at once apparent, amounting, as it does, to a merely precautionary and protective measure—in one word, to that tabu, or divinity of prevention which, in this instance, is taken on behalf of the king and royal family. So that in the event of the existence in the crop of impurities—that is, of malign or poisonous influences—the person of the king, representative as he is of ancestral authority, will remain safe and unharmed. So soon, therefore, as it is known that this is pure and eatable, the king enters a small and private Ju-Ju house that is secreted in the bush, in which he remains for four days without food of any kind, sustaining himself on liquid only. Then breaking the divine tabu by divine sanction, he pays a visit to each town belonging to the community, to give them an opportunity of seeing and speaking to him, and once more retires into the solitary confinement which is so exclusively symbolical of his kingly office.

4. *Ogba-Lido*.—Literally the feast of hunters.

This, which is a ceremony consisting of sacrificial offerings, feasting, dancing, and singing that is offered to the communal gods of protection, is a gathering in every community, by the members of the fraternity of warriors and hunters, identical in every way to the “peri” of the Brassmen alluded to in Chapter II., Section IV. These, from the king down to the last joined and youngest member, meet together to celebrate the number of victims, human and animal, that they have killed during the year—each member stating openly, and in the presence of the assembly, how many he individually has been responsible for. And as it is customary to observe certain special rites, which include a sacrifice of the victim in question, to the protecting god, at the actual time of occurrence—in addition to the fact that the death of a human being outside the community, or of some large fierce animal, is always an event and a red-letter day in its annals—it is not possible for any member either to romance or to exaggerate his prowess in either direction.

5. *Ofala*.—A celebration to Ofo, god of justice and right, in honour of the public appearance of the king.

With the exception of the appearance referred to at the termination of the Owu-waji festival, this is the only occasion year by year on which the king is ever visible to his people.

To give notice of the feast or summons to the royal presence three cannons or guns are fired at three different periods of the day; as a rule, in the morning, at mid-day, and during the afternoon. Immediately afterwards a special drum is beaten, as a form of announcement and a herald of his approach, and then the king comes out into the courtyard or open space inside his quarters, crowned and dressed up in all the finery that he is possessed of, and accompanied by a large retinue, consisting of all the chiefs and his own household, who form themselves into a procession.

An exhibition of dancing by the men and women of the place, accompanied by drums and a chant to the glory and honour of the king, which is sung by the chiefs alone, is now given, and when it is over the procession again forms up and proceeds to the farthest end of the royal enclosure, where a sacrifice is performed. When this—the details of which will be given under the heading of Sacrifices and Scapegoats—has been completed, the king and chiefs once more return to the people outside, who are excluded from this portion of the ceremony. Dancing is vigorously kept up the whole time, and towards the end of the proceedings the king sits in state, surrounded by the whole community, and foretells the events of the ensuing year—a matter which among the Brass, Ijo, and other coast tribes is invariably undertaken by the high priests.

6. *Ikele-Beji*, also called *Ito-Ukpukpa*.—The crumbs or remnants of yam.

This old-time ceremony, which in some parts has of recent years fallen into disuse, is a royal prerogative reserved for the king only, of eating fufu or mashed yam all by himself—an offering of which is made to his own ancestral Osi.

This, without doubt, is the same custom as that alluded to in Chapter II. of this section, in which the priest of the god Nkwu Abasi eats a ball compounded of mashed yam and fish bones. For although it is indubitably an act of obeisance and an oblation from the king or priest to the deity, it is also, as I



have previously remarked, an act of vindication on the part of the former as between himself and the people.

7. *Ifèjioku*.—The feast of roast yam.

This, the last, but by no means the least of their feasts, is performed at the close of the year. It is a general festival and holiday for all the people, in which sacrifices, usually animal, and thanksgiving are offered direct to *Ifèjioku*, god of the crops, as a token of public gratitude on the part of the community for a fruitful and prosperous year. More than this, the termination of it not only marks the end of the native year, but serves also as a form of public notice that farming has to recommence. Reserving, as I have done, the greater and most important part of the details, with regard to their ritual, for the next two chapters, there is little more left for me to say. One thing is quite obvious, and that is the real human motive which in each case has prompted the observance of these rites. For in accordance with a belief and a system such as these natives practise, there is no efficacy in prayer without a sacrifice or an offering. Prayer, in fact, is but an outcome of the sacrifice, and only useful as a communication or announcement to the gods that the latter has been completed. There are, therefore, only three forms of ritual which are in use: (1) an offering in anticipation of favours that have been invoked; (2) a thanksgiving offering; (3) a votive offering. But it will be observed that while the former, invocations are reserved almost entirely for private or household worship, except in special cases of emergency or exigency, when a common danger or misfortune threatens, the latter form of service is practically public or communal.

But before passing on to the contemplation of the more serious aspect of their adoration, there are certain lesser features—those of dancing, singing, and feasting in connection with it—that it is necessary to call the reader's attention to. Dancing, singing, eating, and drinking—in one word, feasting or relaxing—is with these natives most undoubtedly a sincere and genuine form of adoration, a manifestation of joy and gratitude for favours received. It is an external demonstration of those higher and inner emotions which, in natural man, are instinctive and inexpressible; identically the same instincts



which, in the civilised unit, express themselves among theologians in religious revivals, and among rationalists in that silent and unconscious feeling of sheer exuberance in the mere fact of living that is felt more particularly in spring, or on a bright fine day, after a long spell of bad weather. So when the oblations have been offered, and the gods have expressed their entire satisfaction with their people by showering on them the material blessings which they stand in need of, the dancing and singing of the latter is but an uplifting of their souls and the outpouring of their bodies in the sheer delight of an existence over which the doom of the react and the unexpected is always hovering.

## CHAPTER V

### A DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATION OF THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM

#### A. HUMAN SACRIFICE

It will now be necessary for us to examine those customs that constitute the entire basis and fabric of naturism or ancestor-worship. These consist of sacrifices and offerings: the former are divided into human and animal, and the latter into gifts of food and liquor, such as eggs, fruit, vegetables, palm wine, or spirits; or goods of various descriptions, as, *e.g.*, cloth, dyes, chalk, hardware, and among the coast tribes any form of European, mechanical, or artificial articles.

And as being quite the most essential and sacred, therefore the most vital sacrament of their ritual, it will be necessary to begin with human sacrifice. Because in selecting it as the first and principal in importance of their religious rites—the substance, spirit, and practice of their religion, in fact—I have done so, not merely because in a dual sense it involves the loss of human life, as well as the release and utilisation of the spiritual, but because in their own eyes it is the oldest, as it is the most mysterious and indispensable custom in existence. Not only a mystery on account of its age, however, but because in some unaccountable way, which is quite beyond the heights and depths of their philosophy, human sacrifice has always been so integral a feature of their life—both human and spiritual—that they have never known or imagined a period in which it has not figured. So that as the inevitable groundwork of their entire social, in other words religious system, natural society has always found it impossible to dissociate itself from the custom.

Improvident as these natives, and in fact all natural people are, blended with their improvidence is a strong sense of the practical, which, combining as it does with the instinct to acquire personal property, helps to convert them into keen and shrewd traders.

Consistent with this commercial spirit, it is the worldly ambition of every ego to become rich and powerful, and the standard by which these two factors are measured is by the number of wives and slaves that are in his possession. Assessing the average value of the latter at £10 per head, the monetary value of a human sacrifice varies, accordingly, from £10 up to and in excess of £1000, dependent, of course, on the wealth and importance of the deceased—which means that from one to a hundred and more slaves are sacrificed on such an occasion. But this estimate in no way includes the utility or working value that each of these domestics represents to the master of the house.

From this very material aspect, it is not humanly possible to suppose for an instant that the son or successor to a household—the latter more particularly, a promoted slave as in many instances he is—would willingly impoverish or ruin himself and house simply for the mere lust of blood, or to provide his late father and master with a costly funeral. For vain, improvident, and lavish of display as these people indubitably are, they are not so foolishly improvident or so inordinately vain as to throw away, merely for a sentiment or an idea, the excellent material that, if retained, would enable them in person to make a display, and what is more to the point, their power felt, during a whole lifetime.

But this, which to the civilised European is a mere whim or brutal carnal lust, is, as we have seen in Chapter II., Section IV., an indispensable sacrament, hoary with time and tradition, backed up by an authority which, emanating from God, and handed down to them by a long line of ancestors, is all the more sacred and inevitable in their eyes. For taking into consideration the essential significance to them of blood—the very life, and connected in some mysterious way with the soul or fruit of the body, as it is believed to be—the shedding of blood in a righteous cause is in itself a sacred act. So that

in the case of human sacrifice neither excuse nor justification ever even enters into their philosophy.

As this is a point which, almost more so than any of the others that are contained in this book, I have times without number discussed in many and various localities with the people themselves, in a friendly and unimpassioned manner, I feel myself specially qualified to express an opinion thereon. For although, apart from any moral considerations regarding the inhumanity of the act, they were willing enough to admit the sense of my arguments, which were invariably advanced from the standpoint of utility and domestic economy; and notwithstanding the fact that those of them who are actually under our administration have professedly, and in some few instances actually, discontinued the practice, they cannot in reality wrench themselves away from a custom that is a bond of union and association between their fathers in the spirit and their successors in the flesh. Because where religion—*i.e.* life—is concerned, even the fear of the present punishment from the Government is not strong enough to quench the belief and associations that have ruled them for all time.

Looking into the details of the question, although the sacrifice of human beings primarily and to this day was reserved for very special occasions only, and more particularly so on the death of any titled or important persons, and as a scapegoat for every community,—in the former instance to accompany them as befitting their position into spiritland, and in the latter to carry away all the evil spirits from the community,—there are others of no less importance in the same spiritual sense.

Of this nature are the sacrifices that are offered up to the ancestral deities, or to the powers of evil, to avert any specific or anticipated danger—as in the case of Benin city, when after the massacre of Mr. Phillips and his party something like 150 human beings were sacrificed to secure and make certain of spiritual assistance from the gods.

Another occasion which in the native estimation demands a human sacrifice, is the very serious offence of breaking the market laws, for which the penalty is death. This law, which prevails all over the interior, allows the offender who is rich or powerful to provide a substitute. The unfortunate victim is

clothed with white baft, then tied hand and foot to a tree in the centre of the market-place, and left there until he dies. The severity of the sentence, as in other cases, notably that of theft, is due of course to the fact that only rigorous measures are effective. Besides, in the case under consideration, the fact that people from various towns are gathered at the market renders it absolutely necessary to enforce the extreme penalty in order to prevent faction fights, feuds, and bloodshed, and so preserve the peace. In those localities, however, which have come within the influence of our administration the fine of a bullock, which is sacrificed, is imposed instead.

Formerly, too, among the Efik and other coast tribes, a human being was sacrificed annually, or sometimes oftener, to one of the river or sea gods, in order to hasten the arrival of the slave or trading ships.

Fishing towns near or on the mouths of rivers also annually devoted a man to their river god, with a view to ensure a good fishing season. The custom, it appears, was to tie the wretched victim to a stake in the river at low water, and leave him to be covered by the rising tide, if, in the meantime, he had not been eaten by crocodiles or sharks, both of which swarm, the former in the mouths and the latter in the creeks of the entire Deltas of the Niger and Cross rivers.

Another matter necessitating human sacrifice is in the event of peace being concluded between two communities who have been at war. On this occasion the slave is killed, and, if the belligerents are neighbours, buried on some part of the boundary line lying between the two localities, his blood being called "the blood of reconciliation."

In order to grasp the entire scope of the sacrificial conception with regard to the funeral rites of an elder or chief, it is necessary to look into the routine which is always observed.

When the obsequies have been performed, at least three or four men are killed and buried with the deceased, in order, as it is believed, to raise him—*i.e.* his soul—up by the head and feet when in the grave. A certain number are also hung in the different compartments of the house, one in each of the following places, for example: the hall or ancestral chapel, in which the deity in the form of preventive medicine or the



bitter water is always placed ; the sitting, sleeping, eating, and washing rooms ; and the kitchen. Some are also hung in the street or roadway, and it is usual also to sacrifice those slaves whom the chief prior to his death has mentioned as being his hand, his foot, his face, or his skin.

The entire idea and principle upon which these places are selected is obviously based on the assumption that the released souls or spirits of these identical attendants will occupy similar positions, and carry out the same duties in exactly the same relative places in spiritland as they have done in this existence. The very names for male and female slaves, who have been purchased and reserved for sacrificial purposes, are sufficient evidence in themselves of the utility and humanness of it all. Thus *Oka*, literally foot in *Ibo*, is applied to the former as being the feet, therefore the messengers and servants of their owner and master, and, as such, ever ready to be at his beck and call, and to do his bidding, as befitting his rank and position, and so as to save his dignity and his own feet. Similarly, *Abor*, which literally means a market or trading basket, is the name given to all female slaves who are purchased by rich and influential women for the same purpose, the specific idea in this phase of the matter ostensibly being, that the *Abor* will carry her mistress's basket for her when they go marketing in spiritland.

Those slaves who have been hung are afterwards cut down and decapitated, and small boys who happen to pick up the heads are at once recognised as having a big future in front of them. It is evident that this belief is in itself significant of the spiritual importance of the ceremony, when even an act such as this, which to the European appears so trivial, is thus construed. Among all these tribes, but principally among the *Efik*, *Ibibio*, and *Ibo*, living virgins were formerly sacrificed according to old custom at the funeral rites of a chief. The snuff-box, sword, and staff, or umbrella bearers, and other personal attendants, are also suddenly killed, sacrificed, and thrown into the grave along with the insignia of their various offices. Further, a slave is invariably sacrificed to the carved staff or walking-stick, called *Ekpenyon* by the *Efik* ; or to the *Duen fubara* of the New Calabar, *Ibani*, etc., both of which

are ancestral emblems, while one of those who are buried with the deceased is thrown into the grave alive, with only his hands and feet broken.

Immense quantities of food and spirits, trade goods, and copper rods, manillas or cowries, according to the locality, are also added. Among the Efik and coast tribes generally, this pit, which is dug inside the house, has a recess on one side of it, in which a bed or a sofa is placed with the body fully and richly dressed, and in the case of a king a crown is placed on the head. When the pit has been filled in, the ground is trampled down and beaten hard, so as to allow no traces to remain, and in this way to prevent violation either from cupidity or revenge.

Subsequent to the final burial ceremony a memorial service is held annually in honour of the departed magnate, and in the interior it is customary for a party, headed by a drummer, to take a walk round the neighbouring country, with the idea of seizing a man and a woman for sacrificial purposes. On the return of the party to town the captives are beheaded and their bodies eaten.

### B. THE SCAPEGOAT: HUMAN AND EMBLEMATIC

The custom of offering up a virgin as a scapegoat was and is an act that has always been made in entire consonance with the innate sincerity of their beliefs as an offering of the flesh and of the spirit to the ancestral deities, in order to obtain their spiritual aid in removing to a safe distance all those evil spirits that were obnoxious and harmful to a community.

That at one time the practice was common to every tribe in the Delta is quite certain, and that it is still practised among a great many—even among those who are in the immediate and near vicinity of such civilisation as we have introduced—is also, unfortunately, a matter of equal certainty. Indeed, I know for a fact that many of these ancient and time-honoured customs were, three years ago, and are for the matter of that now, being performed in secret under the very noses of our administration. This custom of the scapegoat, which, as a rule, is observed annually by practically all the tribes, was

occasionally, however,—by the Ibani, *e.g.*,—only practised once in two, three, and sometimes in seven years.

In a book of reminiscences published about 1836 by a Captain Crow, who had been master of a slave-trading vessel which had traded between Bonny and the West Indies towards the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, this custom is alluded to. According to him, a virgin of from fifteen to sixteen years of age was thus sacrificed as a propitiatory offering to Boreas—God of the North Wind. As a matter of fact, however, the ceremony was performed as a general purgation of the whole community, and an offering to Simingi, which, literally interpreted, means the bad or rough water, *i.e.* the god who disturbed and converted the water into an element of danger or evil—practically speaking, the devil of the community. Some weeks previous to the event the victim was led through the town of Bonny, attended by priests. Every house, rich and poor, was thus visited, and any article that she took a fancy to or expressed a wish for was given to her. In this way, when she was quite satisfied with the amount of things collected, and had expressed willingness to die, she was placed along with them in a large canoe and taken to a spot about twenty miles from the town, and then thrown by the priests with the booty into the sea.

In the interior, especially among those tribes and clans who have not come into touch with civilisation except in an indirect way through articles of commerce, the rite is not only held annually, but performed with all the pomp and ceremony that the town or community is able to muster, accompanied, as all their religious festivals are, by dancing, feasting, and every outward manifestation of joy and mirth.

It is customary to buy the intended victim many months previous to the occasion, and during the interim that elapses the girl is clothed, fed, and well looked after in every way. In some localities—at Onitsha, for example, prior to 1886, when the Royal Niger Company first assumed the reigns of administration—two of these sacrifices were made, the first being performed altogether in secret, and in some hidden recess of the forest, to purge the king from all evil for the ensuing year; the second a public ceremony on behalf of the people.

With this object in view a fund was raised by special contributions from all the members of the community, and two slaves were purchased in the interior.

On the day appointed, a short period subsequent to the second rite, the girl, who was decorated with palm leaves, was brought to the king's house with her hands tied behind her back, and her legs fastened together by rope. From here, with her face downward, she was dragged all the way to the river, a distance of two miles. The men to whom this task was allotted, as they dragged the unfortunate creature along, kept on crying *Aroye-aroye*, *i.e.* Evil, Evil. During the progress of the ghastly procession, as it passed the entrance or doorway of each house, the occupants came out and threw a small piece of stick or stone on to the body, at the same time that they addressed a brief petition to the manes to bear away from their abode, in the person of the victim, all the evil that had been and was with them. When the whole town had been paraded in this cruel and brutal manner the hapless creature, more dead than alive, was then dragged to the water-side, where her body was placed in a canoe and escorted by the priests to the deepest part of the river, into which it was thrown.

It is noticeable and significant that in this very important ceremony no blood is shed. Yet in no sense of the word is it any the less substantial or binding. The only practical explanation of this which seems to offer as acceptable from a natural aspect is that it has always been considered essential in this sacrifice of expiation to keep the offering intact, so that the act of purgation or removal of the evil element could be all the more efficaciously performed. The mere fact, too, that the victim receives and carries away all the evils of the community renders it so much the more necessary to get rid of the sacrifice in its entirety as an unclean and therefore undesirable object.

There is, however, another form in which the ceremony is performed by some of the coast tribes, among whom and the resident Europeans it is commonly spoken of as driving out the devil or devils, *i.e.* evil spirits.

I have previously alluded to the ceremony in question, in



Section IV., Chapter I., under its Efik name of Ndok, which is nothing more or less than the biennial purification of Duke Town from all evil spirits, which takes place usually towards the end of the year. Whether it is still in existence or not I cannot say, but a description of it as it was celebrated only a few years ago will most undoubtedly give the reader a clear insight into the inner conception, not only of the rite itself, but of those vital principles out of which their faith has emerged and developed. Some days prior to the final or culminating ceremony it is customary for every household in the town to make rude figures, called Nabikim, of various animals, among which are to be seen elephants, leopards, crocodiles, manitis, bullocks, etc. These, which are constructed out of reeds and sticks, are lashed together, covered over with cloth, and set up before the door or at the entrance to each house.

Early on the morning of the day appointed — usually about 3 A.M.—the closing ceremony begins with a deafening outburst of noise, that can only be likened to the descent of an approaching and ever-increasing tornado rushing into a valley of deep and deathlike silence.

Let the reader image, if he can, some 30,000 persons, boiling over with religious fervour and spiritual excitement, their energies braced up for the occasion with pent-up emotions and passions that have been concentrated for one supreme effort that is to purge them of all antipathies and impurities, and to rid them of the society of those spirits that have lived with them, in many cases on terms of intimate familiarity. Immediately in every house the mimic thunder of cannon is heard, mingling with the rattle of musketry, the beating of drums, and the clatter of pots, pans, doors, or of anything, in fact, that is capable of making a noise. For two ideas are at work in the minds of the people. One is, that those spirits who are evil and inimical to the interests of the community at large, however necessary and whatever importance they may possess for the individual, must go. The other is, to make all the noise that is possible in order to effect this removal.

But with regard to the noise this is not all, for the cattle,



which always sleep in the town, driven simply mad with fear, and infuriated by the unaccustomed uproar that is so foreign to the ordinary groove of their placid existence, gallop up and down the streets, bellowing and snorting, with heads erect and tails flying, not knowing where to go or what to do.

Let the imaginative reader picture to himself the squalid town with its moist and murky atmosphere, and the gloomy monotony of its mangrove environment, that is all the murkier because of the thronging spirits, and even then the imposing array of ancestral bogies which his mind has conjured up will fall short of the reality as it appears in the imaginations of the natives, who see myriads out of each eye, at the same time that they feel them in every quivering sense.

Add these ghostly legions to the human side of the account, and the imagination of the reader will better conceive than I can describe the demoniacal pandemonium that is evoked by this old-time custom. To the ordinary observer who visits the town in the height of the tempest the scene presented is merely that of a mob of fantastic madmen and painted fiends let loose, and the external aspect will justify his opinion. But the observer who passes behind the scenes, or, better still, who looks underneath the boisterous superficiality of the exterior into the turmoil of the shadow existences, will encounter a revelation. For he will make the discovery of a spirit world, a diabolical inferno, weird, grotesque, and devilish, such, in fact, as no rational or reasonable imagination, but only that of a thought-tortured Dante or a demented poet-dreamer could possibly conceive.

Threading his way unobtrusively through the excited and demented crowds, with every faculty ever ready, and all his senses on the alert, he would observe, as I have in innumerable instances done, sincere and genuine outbursts of grief on the part of various individuals—invariably slaves—on behalf and in remembrance of departed relatives, whose spirits, and therefore personalities, had in this rude way been expelled, as far as they were concerned, for all eternity. And if he understood the inner workings of these people as I do, he would at once realise the infinite pathos and the intense ecstasy that actuates these heart-rending, passionate bemoanings. For there

are in these wild and untamed savages the same feelings of natural tenderness and affection, the same love of association and attachment for the domestic felicities, that are to be found in the breasts of those who belong to the more favoured and cultured races.

At the approach of dawn the diabolical din, which has been sustained without flinching or flagging, begins to subside, and ceases altogether on the appearance of the sun upon the scene. The houses by now are all thoroughly set in order and garnished, having been swept from the roof to the floor, and the dirt which has been so collected, along with the remains of old fires and the Nabikim, are carried by the members of each household down to the river's brink and thrown into the water. Thus is the town purged of its evil spirits, who, driven by the popular voice and clamour into the Nabikim, or different emblems that are constructed by each household as indicative of the natural element that is most inimical to them, are swept away on the ebb-tide of the river beyond the sphere of active operations, and banished, in the opinion of the public, for good, or at least for a definite time, from the precincts that had been so familiar to them.

### C. ANIMAL SACRIFICE, ALSO FRUIT AND OTHER OFFERINGS

So many references have been made to the question of animal sacrifices that it is not my intention to enter into any further or more elaborate descriptions. It will be necessary, however, to bring forward a few facts in relation to the custom.

While animals of various kinds—outside those which are emblematical—are sacrificed, it is, as a rule, customary to select only domesticated species, such as bullocks, goats, sheep, fowls, and dogs, which are specially reserved for the purpose. This, indeed, appears to be the sole and only reason for which these animals are maintained and set apart; *vide* Section IV.

These animal sacrifices are made on exactly the same principle of propitiation as the human, and with the same idea of substantiality to the spirits, who receive their due meed of the spiritual essence of these offerings in spiritland. Palm oil is

an indispensable article in many sacrifices, and, apart from its undoubtedly phallic significance, the idea that has actuated its use is one of gladness and acceptance to the deity concerned, in return for a favour so gracious and acceptable. This sacred significance is well exemplified in the following custom: When, for instance, a son is disinherited by his father, the father rubs palm oil on the arms of the son, but if through mediation he is once more restored to favour, the son rubs palm oil on his father's arms, and at the same time brings a goat and an egg, which are first sacrificed and then eaten.

Oil, however, is not the only article that is in sacrificial use, for chalk, earth—*i.e.* mud or clay—and dyes of various colours, but yellow and white principally, are of quite as much significance, and equally sacred.

Thus, for example, when a man has been acquitted by the head of his house of a charge which has been brought against him, the entire matter is at once for ever decided by the act which he performs of rubbing the released prisoner's arms and breast with chalk or mud in token of acquittal. So, too, a man who divorces or repudiates his wife rubs her arms with chalk and turns her out of his house, to return to her own people if free-born, or to live among his servants if a slave. If, however, her lord and master prove lenient, and through the offices of an intermediary she is restored again to favour, she begs his forgiveness and rubs his arms with chalk. This in her case must be done with a large piece, and the strokes must be broad in order to show her heartiness, and so as to obtain his acceptance.

This anointing of the body and limbs with chalk, dyes, or earth, by decorating usually the eyes and arms, is to be seen in every sacrificial ceremony, the officiating priest, eldest son, or diviner being always thus anointed, a solution of mud and water—as we have seen in Section V., Chapter I.—being also considered efficacious for persons possessed by spirits. In the same way it was always customary for all persons who had returned from consulting the Aro Chuku, and who, on that account, were considered, for some few days at least—usually seven—to be sacred, to adorn themselves in a similar manner. This is generally done by daubing the yellow dye called Edo

on the forehead, as well as bespectacling both eyes with it. In Brass, previous to going to war, the warmen always went to the Ju-Ju house and had chalk rubbed on their faces. And finally, as we have seen, chalk is used in the marriage ceremony.

There is one other rite which deserves mention, and that is the custom which generally prevails, but which I have myself principally found among the Ibo, Efik, and Ibibio, of frequently consecrating children, white kids, and white chickens to the ancestral divinities, and sometimes to the Supreme God. When it has been decided to do so, the child or animal selected is brought before the household god and the basin containing the sacred water, and the name of the deity is there and then conferred upon it, at the same time that a petition is offered up on its behalf. This, as usual, is brief and to the point, and as the entire dedication is a thanksgiving offering, protection, prosperity, and safety on the object so consecrated are always requested. If, however, misfortune should by any chance happen to it, it is usual to replace the object as soon as possible.

Young women and also young men are frequently selected and set apart for the service of their god—*vide* Chapter III.—and animals are sacrificed in their honour at annual ceremonies, but in no case that I know of are these votaries ever offered up as sacrificial victims.

The next very important and equally indispensable item in the formula of sacrificial ritual is, that every victim must be clean and spotless, and every sacrifice that is offered should be without blemish of any kind. In the event, for instance, of this being human, no deformed person, or one with even the faintest suspicion of a sore, or mark of any kind on the skin, or who has a finger or toe missing, can ever be offered, and even a person with a squint is, as an invariable rule, rejected.

In the same way every animal, whether it be a bullock, goat, sheep, fowl, or dog, before it is offered is first of all carefully examined, and if a scratch or incision is found on any part of its body, or a limb is seen to be bruised or broken, it is instantly classed as unclean and unfit.



It will be as well, perhaps, at this juncture to point out that certain established rules are invariably observed in connection with the sacrificial system. Thus, *e.g.*, while human beings are, as a rule, reserved only for the principal deities and events of primary importance, animals are utilised for those of secondary consequence, food, fruit, and offerings of such description ranking least and last of all. So that the latter, and among domestic animals the fowl, as being the commonest and most economical, is most often offered to meet those ordinary requirements of the daily routine which are absolutely essential to keep in touch with the ancestral authorities. In the same way the bullock, as the largest and most expensive item next to the human being, is the least of all used, the goat occupying a mean between the two. The sacrifice of the dog, however, forms an exception to the general rule, in some measure on account of its scarcity and utility in the hunting-field, but also because it is held in less repute. Whatever the principle that was embodied in the original concept, this animal is not, as a rule, offered to the Supreme God or departmental deities, but always to water or other spirits, and frequently among the interior natives to the malicious spirits of disease. So among the New Calabar people, for instance, only a dog is sacrificed annually to the Okpolodo-Oru, and the Bekere-Oru, both water spirits, whose emblem consists of three mangrove sticks tied together, and to the latter of whom no Ju-Ju house or even shrine is built.

But equally important and essential as any one of the preceding customs is the principle upon which every animal sacrifice is made. I have already alluded to this in the previous chapter by pointing to the fact that in connection with this form of ceremonial the shedding of blood is a dual and inevitable requisite—first of all as a propitiatory measure to the gods; secondly, as a means of prevention or removal of any malign or inimical spirit influences. With this object in view, the blood of every victim that is slain and offered for sacrifice, whether human or animal, is sprinkled not only on the altars and on the emblems, but also on the ivory tusks or horns which, in many localities, are on the altars, as well as on the foreheads of the worshippers.



The vital importance that blood bears to the actual act of sacrifice is, however, seen not only in the fact that it sanctifies the ceremony by purging those concerned of evil, but by drawing together or reconciling any two parties or individuals—as in the case of the two belligerents previously mentioned—it becomes a bond of reconciliation, a secret compact between them, a solemn vow or covenant, that is rarely if ever broken, if for no other reason, simply because the vengeance and destruction of the deities is dreaded.

Thus all over the Delta it is by no means an uncommon event to find blood alliances existing, and which have existed for long periods between two towns and communities. The people of Uwet, for example, are in an alliance of brotherhood with the Efik, both being bound by the most solemn oath on the Mbiam never to look on each other's blood; and the same form of alliance formerly bound together the Brassmen and the Ibani, which at once explains the reason of the good fellowship that has always existed between them.

Another form of this ancient custom is to be found among the people of the Kwa river, in the vicinity of Old Calabar, who some fifty years ago banded themselves together by a blood compact, which was formed for mutual protection against the aggressive encroachments of their powerful Efik neighbours, who on such occasions, when victims were required for human sacrifice, had made it a regular practice to go into their territory and seize members of their community.

But this blood alliance is as much in vogue between individuals as it is among communities, and I have even known instances when compacts of this kind are made between members of different tribes. On these occasions, whether the bond is cemented between members of the same or of the opposite sex, the following ceremony is performed. Each of the persons thus associated makes a scratch or small cut on the arm of the other, and then while they lick each other's blood they make a vow that having joined themselves together they will never part from one another.

The sacrificed animals are, in accordance with the time-honoured law of ancient custom, to be white. Consequently on all necessary occasions the priests or diviners at once demand

white goats, white sheep, white fowls, white pigeons, etc., and a single spot on any one of these detracts from or depreciates the real efficacy of the offering. In all cases of prophetic announcements or prognostications by the high priests or kings, white baft is always offered and white animals are always sacrificed.

Finally, no cloth is used either in a sacrificial or, indeed, in a religious sense of any sort—to deck the victim, to surround the groves or shrines, or to adorn the bows of canoes, for example—except it is white, and the priests are invariably clad in garments of the same colour and material. White cloth or, in lieu of it, a green twig or branch of a tree is invariably employed by all these natives as a sign of peace and good-will, and at all the water shrines that are placed on the creeks and rivers, and in many of the groves belonging to the coast natives, it is used exclusively either to bind round a symbol or as an offering to the spirit. But although white is usually considered a sacred colour, of course, as pointed out in Section VI., Chapter III., colours vary with localities, and those which are acceptable in one place are invariably tabu in another.

So, too, among practically all the tribes, whether on the coast or in the interior, it is the custom to tie together strips of white baft, or to make a chain of withes in large links and festoons, which are stretched across the paths from tree to tree with the idea of keeping off intruding spirits and all malicious influences generally. The popular belief in these preventive charms is that by securing the aid of the guardian spirits they are rendered effective in bringing destruction on all those who in any way interfere with them. That, however, they really deter would-be depredators from injuring the farms over which they preside is quite certain and further evidence in regard to the real sincerity and blindness of their beliefs.

To give the reader some faint idea of the innate power of association and custom, even where animals of no very recognised form of intelligence are concerned, there is in a certain locality in the middle reaches of the Delta a little-known pool of water in which live a few old crocodiles, who

are said to be hoary with the weight of the years which have passed over them. The priest who presides over these monsters has them well in hand, and when he is desirous of propitiating these sacred emblems of his ancestors he first of all approaches them with a fowl, or it may be a goat. Knowing his voice, they come out of the water in answer to it to receive his offering, but, mark well, the sacrificial victim must be white, for no other colour, it appears, will satisfy these saurians.

A custom which formerly was practised by the Ibani, and is still prevalent among all the interior tribes, consists in prolonging the life of a king or ancestral representative by the daily, or possibly weekly, sacrifice of a chicken and egg. Every morning, as soon as the patriarch has risen from his bed, the sacrificial articles are procured either by his mother, head wife, or eldest daughter, and given to the priest, who receives them on the open space in front of the house. When this has been reported to the patriarch, he comes outside and, sitting down, joins in the ceremony. Taking the chicken in his hand, the priest first of all touches the patriarch's face with it, and afterwards passes it over the whole of his body. He then cuts its throat and allows the blood to drop on the ground. Mixing the blood and the earth into a paste he rubs it on the old man's forehead and breast, and this is not washed off under any circumstances until the evening. The chicken and the egg, also a piece of white cloth, are now tied on to a stick, which, if a stream is in the near vicinity, is planted in the ground at the water-side. During the carriage of these articles to the place in question, all the wives and many members of the household accompany the priest, invoking the deity as they go to prolong their father's life. This is done in the firm conviction that through the sacrifice of each chicken his life will be accordingly prolonged; for once more it is quite evident that the entire principle of this belief in the efficacy of sacrifice is because of the spiritual release and increase that occurs through the death of the material being.

#### D. THE DESTRUCTION OF TWINS

Although the destruction of twins is not, in the strict sense of the word, a sacrifice, it is all the same a sacrificial offering, very much in the same light as the purification ceremonies which have been just described. For the custom, based on the identical spiritual principle of an evil react, is treated as one of offence against the ancestral gods that must of necessity be removed, along with the offending cause—the woman.

As I have already pointed out with regard to human sacrifice, this too is a purely religious custom, the origin of which is lost in antiquity, and due apparently to the conception that one birth at a time is the distinguishing feature between man and all other creation, and therefore the birth of twins was regarded as an unnatural event, to be ascribed solely to the influence of malign spirits, acting in conjunction with the power of evil. And the custom has been tenaciously adhered to, in spite of the fact that every child born into a family, apart from all other human considerations, has a monetary and a practical value attached to it.

Indeed, according to their ancient faith, although two energies are requisite to produce a unit, the production of two such units is out of the common groove, therefore unnatural, because it implies at once a spirit duality, or enforced possession by some intruding and malignant demon, in the yielding and offending person of a member of the household, consequently an outrage committed upon the domestic sanctity. For in their opinion, the natural product of two human energies, as a single unit, is only endowed, or provided with, one soul-spirit. The custom that prevails among the Ibo and Brassmen of allowing one—always the first-born of the twins—to live, is a practical admission of this conception.

The custom is universal throughout the Delta, and is only dying out in those few localities in which the people are actually in touch with civilisation. The advent of twins is looked on in every home of the Delta not only with horror and detestation, but as an evil and a curse that is bound to



provoke the domestic gods to anger and retribution. In order, therefore, to avert the expected vengeance, it is the standing law of the priests that no time is to be lost in at once removing the unfortunate infants. This is generally done by throwing them into the bush, to be devoured by wild animals, or the equally ferocious driver ants, or sometimes, as is done by the Ibibio, Ijo, and other coast tribes, by setting them adrift in the rivers and creeks in roughly made baskets of reeds and bulrushes, when they are soon drowned, or swallowed by sharks or crocodiles.

In most cases the mothers, who are looked on as unclean, are driven out of the town and into the bush, and unless given protection by the people of another community, or surreptitiously fed by some old crony, they often fare as badly as their offspring, whom they look upon as the work of evil spirits.

In some cases, however, humaner treatment is accorded to them. In Ibani, for instance, it was customary, as it now is among the other middlemen, to quarantine the unclean mothers in an out-of-the-way hut for a period of sixteen days. Here neither man, woman, nor child dare visit them, with the exception of certain old women who were specially set apart to tend and provide them with food, water, and other necessary requirements. At the end of this time they were brought out and obliged to undergo the ceremony of purification, at the hands of the priests, which, in addition to washing off the chalk that had previously been smeared all over their bodies, consisted of the sacrifice of a chicken, or a new-born pup. Besides this, the father, or in the case of a slave or poor member of a family, the head of the house, was also obliged to avert the wrath of the enraged deity and the consequences that were to be expected, by offering special sacrifices and presenting gifts to the priests—an undertaking which, as a rule, implied a minimum outlay of at least 1600 manillas, equal in those days to about £6:13s., or less or more, according to existing rates. Purified and once more clean and free from evil, the women were received back into the family circle, and the threatened evils were considered to be averted.

In the Ibibio country, and formerly among the Efik, the



regulations with regard to the women are much more elaborate, and in a certain sense humane.

Here, as invariably in all similar cases, the ancestral gods are propitiated by gifts and sacrifices, but the women, looked on as unclean for the rest of their lives, are obliged to reside in villages, which are known as *Twin Towns*, or the habitations of defiled women, appointed for that particular purpose. From this time forth the husband, whether he be head of the house or not, is obliged to maintain a wife who has been so defiled; although at the same time he is strictly forbidden to cohabit or to have any dealings with her, being, as he is in every religious and personal sense, human and spiritual, divorced from her. But in spite of the fact that to him, as well as to all the members of his or her community, the woman is unclean and therefore tabu, the penalty of death being inflicted on both in the event of their breaking the law in this direction, she is allowed to form connections, but on no account to marry with strangers, or men belonging to outside communities, and the offspring resulting from such intercourse becomes, as a matter of course, the property of her husband, or the head of the house.

In order to remove the child from the defiled locality, which cannot, however, be done until it is weaned, *i.e.* when from two to three years old, a special sacrifice of chickens and fowls must first be made. Sacrifice, in fact, is imperative and inevitable in all cases in which intercommunication is necessary, and an interchange of visits is made between all members of the households in question and the defiled women. Thus, for example, when it is obligatory on certain occasions for any near relatives or others of either sex to visit one of these women, the visitors are compelled to sacrifice fowls or goats to the domestic deities, so that the act of contact may not be productive of the evil effect of twins, in any subsequent issues of children, on the part of female visitors; and on exactly the same conditions defiled women are permitted to visit relatives, also to work for their husbands.

But in the event of the defiled woman herself bearing twins again, these must be destroyed unknown to any

one. For, if known, the probabilities are that the death of the mother would be demanded by the household and the community as well. Or if not killed, she would be driven into the bush and left to die, although, if discovered by a stranger, he is at liberty to claim her as his own property, that is, at least, if he feels inclined to run the risk of a venture so truly provocative of offence.

Among the various clans of the Ibo, when the birth of twins takes place, the people belonging to the quarter in which the mother resides are obliged to throw away all the half-burnt firewood, the food cooked, and the water brought in the previous night—everything, in a word, in the shape of nourishment, solid or liquid, because the advent of the unholy twins defiles the house and practically all its contents. To purify the place from this unwelcome pollution, the inevitable sacrifice, consisting in this case of fowls and goats, is there and then performed, and the unclean mother is at once removed from the house and town. Indeed, as soon as a pregnant woman is delivered of a child, and it is known that another is to follow, she is instantly carried into the bush, and when the second is born it is immediately thrown away, while the first-born is retained, and named M'meabo, which means two people.

If it happens also that during childbirth the infant comes out of the womb feet foremost—the event which is referred to as Mkpoto-oko, *i.e.* bad or evil feet—it is regarded in the same light as twin-birth, and the unfortunate mother is accorded exactly the same treatment, her eventual destination in either case being a Twin Town.

The Ibo customs are, however, practically identical with those of the Ibibio, Ijo, and other tribes, except for one or two trifling differences. For example, in the event of the defiled woman bearing issue by a stranger, the children, although the property of the husband, must be maintained by the natural father, who is obliged to pay over the legitimate expenses to the former. The women and the children are, however, placed under certain laws or restrictions, the use of certain trade markets and roads being prohibited to them, but they are permitted to have a market of their own.

In Brass, too, when a woman gives birth to twins, the first-born is kept and the other is thrown away alive. In the event of the former being a male child, it is called Isele, and if a female, Sela, both names meaning selected.

It is a relief to be able to turn away from a picture so gloomy and gruesome to look upon another that presents a direct and striking contrast to it. This we find in the Igarra country, among whom the advent of twins is hailed with joy and acclamation. Indeed, far from imputing it to the intervention of malignant spirits, it is attributed to the good, and the twins themselves are considered a valuable acquisition.

This, on reflection, is all the more incomprehensible, because the Igarra, although in dress and other minor externals they ape Mohammedanism, have a religion which in most of its practices is very similar to that of the Delta tribes, particularly of the Ibo, with whom they are in contact to the south and east. Besides, the Yoruba, from whom it is said that they originated, are a race whose religion is also natural, and only a portion of which has embraced Islamism, and that in a comparatively recent period. When, however, the happy event that is under discussion occurs in Igarra land, the first of the twins to arrive, strange as it may appear to our Western notions, is looked on as the younger, while the second occupies the position of elder. The reason which is assigned by the people for this curious reversal of the natural order is on the assumption, pure and simple, that the younger is sent out first of all by the elder, in token of his inferiority, or rather in acknowledgment of his brother's seniority.

This question of seniority, however, involves no difference on the part of the parents or household as regards their treatment of the pair, which in every respect is similar, everything in the shape of food, raiment, and necessities, as well as luxuries of life, being divided equally amongst them. To such an extreme is this rule carried, that it is even customary for twins to be married on the same day. Indeed, so stringently are these laws observed, that any infringement of them, *i.e.* any favouritism shown to one twin more than to the other, is said to lead to the death of one.

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A big ceremony is held annually to celebrate the anniversary of the natal day of all twins, and so greatly in honour do they appear to be esteemed, that the Igarra have a tradition that no one ever attempts to poison twins, for no poison, even if they swallow it, will have any evil effect on them. Further, while they remain as children, it is believed that they are able to prognosticate with regard to the offspring of a woman that is pregnant.

## CHAPTER VI

### SANCTUARIES OR SACRED PLACES OF REFUGE

IN the direction at least of those crimes and offences which are regarded by humanity as the most serious against society, the moral law is as exacting and as binding on these Delta natives as it is on the most advanced and cultured units of civilisation. So, for example, murder, theft, perjury, adultery, and all offences against the land and ancestral authority, in fact, including treachery, but especially treason with regard to domestic or communal secrets in connection with religion, were and to this day are regarded as capital offences ; while fornication is also severely punished, and virginal chastity is, as a rule, most stringently observed—the safety and modesty of all girls prior to marriage lying in nothing so much as in their absolute nudity. It was presumably, in the first instance, to the existence of laws such as these—which in the younger life of humanity were even more stringent than they now are—that the origin of sanctuary is to be traced. But whatever the primary motive was, it is further evident that the opportunity thus offered to the condemned was in a measure, if not entirely, the result of priestly action or interference, under cloak, of course, of ancestral authority and direction. Not altogether or by any means from any righteous or high-minded motive of clemency, but more than probably with the very human idea of gaining adherents, and in this practical way of increasing their temporal power and influence. But not alone temporal, for although, as we shall see later on, these rescued people became, all the same, spiritual outcasts subsequent to their decease, a sacrificial



capital was manufactured out of the specific acts of rescue, and as a sop to the protecting god. Indeed, the very fact—as pointed out in Chapter III.—that a refugee can claim protection from the head of a house, or rather from the tutelary god of protection, is in itself unmistakable evidence of this.

Apart from the fact that the emblem of the protecting god of every household or community constitutes sanctuary for every stranger claiming it, or equally so the feet of any patriarch if held, there are certain places of refuge, invariably the Ju-Ju houses of specific deities, that are set apart for the use of all those who have offended against the laws of their country, or who have fled from it of their own free will and accord. Thus formerly among the Ibani, *e.g.*, the following places were reserved as sanctuary:—

1. The Ju-Ju house, known as the House of Skulls, of Ekiba, the war god.

2. Ebi, a shrine belonging to one of the many tribal divinities.

3. Fubra, the ancestral shrine of a former king.

4. Perekule, the seat of the ancestral kings of Ibani.

5. Bu-ipri, a small but sacred bush, situated outside the town of Ibani, in the direction of Ju-Ju Town, *i.e.* the abode of the priests. It is, by the way, almost needless for me to say that in these, as, in fact, in all their temples, mud altars are erected, on which stand the images of the gods. On some of them, however, usually those of the war gods—of Ekiba, in this instance—in addition to the emblem a pair of ivory tusks, invariably those of an elephant, are inserted, which (*vide* the Book of Kings, chapter i. verse 50) is nothing, in other words, but “the horns of the altar,” as therein referred to. And just as with the Jews, so with these natives, the escaped criminal or refugee has but to lay hold of them, or in other cases, where there are no horns, merely on the altars, and his person, defiled though it is considered to be, at once becomes inviolate.

In Benin city, when we captured it in 1897, most of the numerous altars in the king's quarters were plentifully stocked with well-carved ivories, all of which were saturated

or sprinkled over with the blood of sacrifices. That there was a history, as shown to some extent by the figured and emblematical carving and the sacrificial blood attaching to each one of these tusks, there can be little or no doubt. For, according to law and custom, it was the king's right to demand one of the tusks of every elephant slain within his dominions. So that it is at least justifiable to assume that each one of these represented, so to speak, a chapter in the life-history of those kings who had reigned over the Bini country—chapters which, although they had reeked with the blood and had resounded with the despairing cries of the countless victims who had been slaughtered as sacrifices to appease the inhuman lust and the voracious gluttony of the master god, had also, no doubt, been witnesses of the sanctuary which had been afforded to the few who had had the good fortune to escape the death to which they had been condemned.

Similarly with regard to the character of the bush Bupri, or of bushes of the same sacred description, a twig or branch broken off, no matter how small, immediately secures the hoped-for freedom, and invests the culprits or runaways with the inviolate halo of divine tabu. They are not allowed to return to live within the precincts of the town or towns belonging to the community which has condemned them, or from which they have escaped, but they are given shelter in the priests' town until the day of their death. While, however, they are still under the protection of the sanctuary that they have claimed, and until their case has been investigated and decided by the council of elders, *i.e.* the king, chiefs, and headmen in council, they are regarded by the people with horror and loathing, as objects which are impure and full of evil. So much so, in fact, that a chance or casual meeting with one of them on the part of some stray passer-by ends in the ignominious flight of the latter. For while contact is not even to be thought of as being a downright misfortune, the forerunner of some hideous calamity, the mere fact of setting eyes on them is in itself sufficiently unfortunate. It is not, in fact, until these Furu-nama, or foul and unclean beasts, as they were designated

by the Ibani, have undergone the inevitable ceremony of purification at the hands of the priests of the devil-god—such, *e.g.*, as Asimingi, Kamallo, or Ogbonuke—that they are permitted to enter a house, or come near any of the other members of the community, outside the priestly body. The sacrificial articles that are used on an occasion such as this are, in the case of a male, twenty-four manillas or its value in cowries, and a white cock; and in that of a female, a white hen or chicken, an egg, and a small bottle of spirits. And the whole concept of this ceremony is with relation to the welfare of the community, and not of the individual offender. For this reason he is purified—*i.e.* purged of the evil that he had committed against the sanctity of the ancestral laws—so that the other members of the community who are clean in this respect should not be corrupted, and their lives unnecessarily endangered.

As soon as sanctuary has been obtained and assured, the priest in charge of that particular Ju-Ju house proclaims the fact to the king's chiefs, and all the notables of the town or community. The case is then considered, and when the purification ceremony, which follows next, is over, and a thanksgiving sacrifice has been offered to the god in return for his clemency, the refugee is then and there dedicated to him as his servant, and his person—even should it happen that he was by right a slave—ceases from this moment to belong to his original master. For as being under a divine protection, he is now sacred and tabu, therefore free, and no one dare lay a finger on his person, or molest him in any shape or form. On the contrary it is the custom—*i.e.* law—that food and clothing are to be supplied to all such persons by the king and chiefs of the community, yet on no account can they be forced to work.

One especially significant feature in connection with this custom is the fact that the protection extended to the criminal is only temporal, and in no sense of the word spiritual. For the right of burial is denied him on his demise, and his corpse is thrown either into a river or the bush, according to the locality. Ancestral salvation, in fact, is denied to him as a matter of course, so that he becomes an outcast. Indeed this

fact is all the more significant as demonstrating that even priestly or divine interference and influence is in their own deepest estimation of no avail in sheltering the human unit from the consequences of his own acts, for which he is alone answerable to the generating fountain-head or creator of all things.

The condition under which the sanctity of the marriage laws can be evaded has already been pointed out in Chapter III. of the previous section. And there is but little doubt that the custom which invested the spirit of this particular blood-plum tree with the protective right of sheltering all such offenders had its origin in an idea and on a principle which was very similar to that which gave rise to sanctuary. If it were only feasible to trace back the origin of the blood-plum divinity, it is very possible that we would discover him to have belonged to some powerful personality with initiative and originality, who had found it to answer his purpose to give shelter to all those persons whom the law had condemned to death for adultery.

But it is evident that it is not in the mud of the altar, not in the ivory of the tusks or horns, nor yet again in the vegetal substance of the leaf or twig, that the efficacy and potentiality lies—indubitably sacred and revered as these are, because of their association and connection with the still more sacred spirit tenants—but in the ancestral spirit element by which the various emblems are tenanted and inspired.

## CHAPTER VII

### A GENERAL ANALYSIS OF THE WHOLE

IN the first place, then, it is very evident that the natives believe in the henotheistic or god-supremacy principle, and that the Creator or Supreme God and His existence is acknowledged by one and all of these people, irrespective of tribe or locality. What is more, this God of these so-called black barbarians, despised and downtrodden though they have been from time immemorial, is the same identical God as that of Jew or Gentile, who created the heaven and the earth and all that lives therein. But with this difference, that while the latter begat a Son who is said to be the Saviour of the world, the Delta deity begat a son from whom has issued the human race. There is, however, another and a still greater difference. For while the supreme gods of the others possess a distinct capacity for inflicting punishment—to put the mildest construction upon the severity of their natures as depicted by the acts and measures of their own disciples—the Delta creator, although he possesses the power of death, does not as a rule exercise it, and to his creatures, or rather children, he is capable of doing good only.

Indeed, strange though it may appear to the theologian or man of science, and although these natives believe in the spiritualism of Nature and in witchcraft practise demonology, they believe, as firmly as does, *e.g.*, the Christian, that there is a Being who lives, it may be in the sky or it may be everywhere, that is the Father and the Master of all beings.

This Being, as has been pointed out, not only has a separate name in each dialect or language, but almost every community



or even town has its own individual name for him; and as such he is not only the maker and owner of all life that lives, but the first great father of the human race. In every part of the Delta that I have been in the same idea prevails; for creation to these people, as we have more than once seen, represents the actual and specific act of reproduction, the animating or spiritual principle belonging to the creator, whose mode of action or procedure, although a mystery altogether beyond their comprehension, bears a decided resemblance in its process to the ancient idea of immaculate conception, which is so common an event in Aryan mythology.

So we will find, on examining the very meagre tradition of the Delta tribes, that in some such mysterious way the creator—*i.e.* the son of the sky god and earth goddess—begat two sons, the elder a black man and the younger a white man, from whom the respective black and white races have sprung. And it is in this very primitive belief that it is so easy to trace all the subsequent ceremonials which have emanated from the one parent stem. For having first of all found it necessary to revere his own immediate ancestor, and the principle which called him into existence, it was but the next natural step to trace that ancestor's descent in a direct line from the first great God—Father of all. Very naturally the act of doing so at once placed mankind on a higher pedestal than the rest of Nature, still believing, as they did, that all creation was from the same source—*i.e.* animated by the same vitalising principle—the belief in transmigration also became an easy and a natural step, a portion of the process, in other words.

It is as well at this stage for me to explain that, cognisant as I was of the prevailing prejudice that exists even in the minds of leading ethnologists regarding this belief in a supreme god, during the period that I served in Southern Nigeria I took the most infinite pains, and made every possible effort to inquire into the question, with the result that has already been given.

Although the morality of these naturists is but a natural morality, *i.e.* the morality which prevails in a state of Nature, they are, as we have already seen, in the strict and natural

sense of the word, a truly and a deeply religious people. In a word, the religion of these natives, as I have all along endeavoured to point out, is their existence, and their existence is their religion, for it is essentially a religion of substantial practice, and not of mere profession and theory.

Thus it is that they have practically put away the Supreme God, the Being who creates and preserves, who is the power for good, in contradistinction to the destroyer with his manifold and self-multiplying energies of destruction, and that it is only on very special occasions of misfortune, when all else, including the ancestral deities, have failed them, that they call upon him ; and *vice versa*, they only thank him in time of unprecedented prosperity.

The reason of this avoidance, as it were, of the Supreme God is simple enough and easily explained, for it is but a recognition and an acknowledgment of his supremacy and goodness and of their own inferiority. From this standpoint, God being on a plane so much above them as to be absolutely unapproachable, they do not consider it necessary to do more than recognise his existence, acting throughout on the practical principle that they have nothing but goodness to expect from him. In other words, there being nothing to fear from him, no cause for fear existing in his direction, fear of him has no place or existence in their minds. So the ceremonial and formula of their religion is nothing but a mere exposition of ingratiating those spiritual influences which have within them the dual capacity of inflicting good or evil ; and who if not so ingratiated, human-like, are more capable of inflicting evil than good ; or of those influences which, coming as they do within the domain of witchcraft or demonology, are altogether evil and malign. Between the Supreme God and humanity there are a certain more or less definite number of spiritual beings—local or communal deities, who live in trees, stones, rivers, mountains, and other natural phenomena, as well as in artificial objects of various kinds ; in a few words, whose emblems are natural or artificial—deities who, although created and deputed by the Supreme God, occupy an independent position with regard to the management and administration of human affairs. These deities, made as they are in

man's own image, are as a matter of course anthropomorphic in form, consequently human or natural in their character, which means in plain English that they are capable both of good and evil; and having their own specific attributes and functions they immediately and specifically represent the varying interests of the various social elements known among the Efik and Ibibio as Idems; they have priests, and in some instances priestesses—the latter of whom are consecrated from birth and always remain celibate—to make sacrifice and prayer to those particular gods to whom they have been dedicated. In spite of the fact that the Creator is seldom approached or referred to except in crises or under very exceptional emergencies, these departmental divinities are in popular estimation regarded as distinctly inferior to him in power and magnitude. Yet placing a purely human construction on the matter as the people do, and looking at it from the standpoint of a mentality which is eminently human, and in no sense either influenced or inspired by any outside or higher element, it is not in the least surprising that, in some respects, these inferior deities are deemed to occupy a position, not only of considerably greater congeniality, but also of more immediate consequence, merely because of the fact of their association with the earth and of their connection with humanity, which brings them into touch with the more substantial, therefore more enjoyable, pleasures of human existence.

This, in a word, is but a revelation or rather reflection of their own native character, which is naturally and pre-eminently sociable. For these people on the whole have no real love for solitude, believing, as they most implicitly do, that it is not good—in other words, natural—for man to be alone. That Nature, in fact, is so constituted by God, that society or companionship is but the inevitable outcome.

Life or existence is a dual element, or combination of the material and the spiritual; in other words, the world as it appears to them is divided into these two main or principal phases, which in their turn are subdivided into the following units: (1) human beings; (2) animal beings; (3) vegetal beings; (4) material beings, the three latter of various

kinds and descriptions, and that the entire vitality of the material phase is due to the animation or inspiration of the spiritual or life-giving principle. It is also evident that, while for the most part the countless host of spiritual beings, who divide their existence between this world and spiritland, are anthropomorphic, there are also spirits of like kin, but varying in degree, confined to the animal, vegetal, and material elements. But while the spirit essence of vegetal and material—also of the animal, except in specific cases and under certain conditions—is confined exclusively to its own species, the anthropomorphic spirit essence is not only interchangeable with the zoomorphic, but possesses the ability to enter into matters of every sort—a characteristic that, with regard to the latter, is limited to human bodies only. From this extremely fundamental standpoint, beyond certain superficial differences which I am now about to point out, there is no further classification of the spirit element that I am aware of. Nor, in fact, within such limitations as have been defined could this be either possible or probable. Spirits, then, are accordingly divided, first of all, into two main classes: (1) the embodied, (2) the disembodied, or, regarded from another standpoint, the ancestral and the non-ancestral. While these again may be subdivided into: (1) the ancestral embodied; (2) the non-ancestral embodied; (3) the ancestral disembodied; (4) the non-ancestral disembodied. In plain English, then, this means that those who are ancestral are capable of good and evil, while those who are not ancestral are at all times inimical; all who are outcast and disembodied being also, as a matter of course, eternally malignant and vicious.

For embodiment or the material is the distinguishing characteristic which divides the natural world of the Supreme God or creative power from the unnatural domain of the evil or destroying power. Because this latter element, under an omnipotent cloak of disembodiment, is neither confined by limits nor regulated by balance of any kind. It is quite obvious, then, that, apart from all polemic or prejudice, these natives have a clear and distinct concept of a god, upon whom they look as the creator, by whose action the conception of all things human, animal, and vegetal takes place, the male



and female energies of the various elements being nothing but mere agents or instruments in his hands. And in continuation of this idea, it is also evident that the sun, moon, stars, rain, dew, lightning, thunder, and other natural phenomena are likewise instruments created by him, into which he has infused his own animating spirit, in the same mysterious way that he has given to humanity that personal gift of reason, which enables it to appreciate, and express its appreciation of the various spiritual influences which surround it, as well as to discriminate between the positive and the negative, or what appeals to it as good and evil.

It is, in fact, on this natural basis that the religion of these natural people is founded and formed. For it is because of the intellect with which God the Creator has endowed mankind that it has been enabled to frame a worship of propitiation and protection, as a set off against the different malign influences which are ever so much stronger than it. And it is in this radical differentiation of the spirit element that the entire crux of their beliefs and principles is centred. So the rest of creation, as being devoid of human reason, is a grade lower and further removed from the great and sublime Supreme; yet, as belonging to the one comprehensive but incomprehensible scheme of creation, none the less utilised by the spiritual as forms of material embodiment, which, from a moral and mystic standpoint, are essential as well as inevitable.

In the early chapters of Part III. I endeavoured to sketch as closely and as concisely as I could the process of evolution of natural religion as it appears to me after close contact with, and a closer observation of, the religion and customs that are practised by a still natural people.

To those who have followed the connections right through, certain salient points must be very evident:—

1. That certain animal or natural instincts form the basis of natural religion.

2. That naturism, or natural religion, embraces within its scope all that belongs to Nature, or all so-called “super”—*i.e.* outside or spiritual—natural elements, and all objects human, animal, vegetal, and material.



3. That while spiritualism is virtually the higher or controlling moral aim and motive of naturism, humanism is actually and in truth the guiding and underlying principle.

4. That although spiritualism is a belief in spirits, it is essentially and primarily a belief in human or ancestral spirits, who not only rule and regulate the operations of the natural elements, but who, after they depart from this world, continue in the spirit to govern their human households.

5. That belief in the transmigratory and interchangeable nature of the soul-spirit was but an outcome of the ancestral cult, in the same way that other beliefs were.

6. That emblemism—as exemplified in so-called totemism, idolatry, and fetichism, also witchcraft—is nothing, as its name implies, but the external representation of the animism of naturism, by specially, and as a rule personally, selected emblems or symbols, which, as containing the more immediate father or departed spirit, are regarded in the light of mediators between the existing household and the ruling ancestral deity.

7. That the propitiation and mediation of all divine and demoniacal spirits, the Creator excepted, are the active and vital principles of the ancestral faith.

8. That spirits are of two kinds; the anthropomorphic, who have the dual energy of good and evil, and the disembodied, *i.e.* demons who are capable of evil only.



SECTION VIII

THE DEMONOLOGY OF THE PEOPLE  
AS PRACTISED IN WITCHCRAFT



## CHAPTER I

### WITCHCRAFT AS IT EXISTS : A GENERAL ESTIMATE OF IT

IN this one word witchcraft is centred and concentrated, with all the devilish craft and subtlety that human nature is capable of, the demonology which is rife among these spirit-ridden people of dual existence. In witchcraft we are confronted with only the evil aspect of nature—what is more, with that aspect which is only capable of evil, and that does not admit of any opposing or counterbalancing element such as good. Here, in fact, we have these natives at their worst.

To start with, magic, although recognised as existing and practised, is not considered lawful. For it is looked upon as outside the domain of even the evil. It is possible, then, to recognise at the very outset two prominent and important landmarks; the first being the entire absence of the ancestral element, and the second, the fact that the powers utilised by the exponents of magic are natural, and of the element that is evil, pure and simple, in contradistinction to social harmony and that which is good. Consequently, the extreme penalty of death is inflicted on any person convicted of witchcraft. For, irrespective of age and sex, witchcraft is a system that terrorises a whole community, because its plots are hatched and all its deeds are done at night under cover of darkness and secrecy—a secrecy which is guarded with even greater care and jealousy than Freemasonry. In spite of the terror with which it has inspired these natives, it seems impossible for them to crush and eschew the system, although it brings upon them not merely all their woe, but most of the death which overtakes them.



As far as it is possible to see, the whole idea of the cult as it prevails in the minds of these natives, irrespective of tribe and locality, is based on the thought, which to them is even more than a reality, that any person who owes another a grudge can, and does, inflict mortal injury on that person. Acting then on this belief, which is an outcome of that inherent curse, *suspicion*, every misfortune or evil which overtakes the individual is at once attributed to this dread horror. So it happens that on the death of a king, chief, or influential and wealthy personage, the suspicion of foul play immediately presents itself. In a large household consisting of several thousand members, as exists among the Jekri, Brassmen, New Calabar, Ibani, and Efik middlemen, in which the personal family alone may consist of many hundreds, it is not always an easy matter even to decide on whom suspicion is to fall.

In this way the poison test or ordeal, as it is found in vogue among these people, must have had its origin. For the belief is that the innocent alone escape, and only the guilty die; and as the death is attributed to a secret and malignant foe, all wives, head slaves, and even friends are forced to establish their innocence in the usual way. Although this custom has to a great extent died out among the coast tribes, many instances—which, of course, occurred previous to the formation of a Protectorate—have been brought to my notice in which as many as three and four score persons have succumbed out of the hundred or more victims who had been obliged to undergo the ordeal. When, for example, the famous Duke Ephraim of Duke Town died in 1835, out of fifty of his household who were obliged to “chop nut”—*i.e.* to drink a decoction of the Esere or Calabar bean—over forty were known to have died. Just to show how tenacious is the grip of this malign influence, should suspicion rest on any particular members of a household the head of which has just died, or should any circumstantial evidence exist, such as known dislike towards deceased, the use of abusive or threatening language, or designs with regard to property, the test can be, and is, applied, in the case of previous failures, twice and even three times.

The following is an illustration of how events shape them-

selves in the everyday life of these demon-haunted people. Let the reader imagine to himself a huge household, at the head of which is an aged chief, who is very feeble and decrepit—so much so that his death may reasonably be expected to occur at any moment. At the head of his house is his head wife, also old, and strong in his esteem as a faithful spouse and capable manager. One day, alas, unfortunately for her, she is either found talking to or in the company of a witch-doctor or diviner. The explanation of this is very simple. For, with previous experience to warn her, the old woman, in anticipation of the immediate future, has only consulted the latter to secure a medicine or charm in order to protect her life on the death of her husband, for whom she has in reality much respect and affection.

But the old woman—unenviable position that she occupies as head wife—has many secret enemies, who have either undermined her influence or poisoned the mind of the chief against her, so that he does not take this the true view of the case, and he suspects that the medicine is for no other purpose but to take his life and hasten his departure to the land of spirits. In spite of the fact that this woman has been bound to him all her life, that she is a woman of influence and capacity and a splendid trader, and has been his right hand—to whom, in fact, he is indebted for much of his prosperity—he has already begun to fear and to hate her.

He too, on his side, sends for and consults a diviner, and the interview, held in secret and at the witching hour of night, is fraught with evil consequences for at least one member of that cumbrous household. This worn-out and effete old atom of human mechanism, forgetful of the past and of all that his head wife has done for him, and dreading the severance of associations and the leap into the unknown, notwithstanding his fatalism, deliberately plans a murder, yet sincere in the belief that if he does not dispose of his wife she at least will dispose of him.

So before many days are over a tragedy, as sudden as it is unexpected to the majority of the household, takes place. Just as the sun is beginning to rise over the tops of the dark

and sombre trees and a glow of brightening light can be seen stealing through the still overhanging gloom, shrieks, that are succeeded by wails, are heard resounding throughout the house, and soon the news is brought to the decrepit old chief that his head wife has been found dead—hanging in her house at the farm. Rumour, many-tongued, and as busy here in these savage haunts as it is amid the hum of civilisation, whispers in one direction that she has taken her own life, and in another, that her husband has taken it for her. So it is of daily occurrence in the domestic drama of Delta life, that a mere incident perfectly innocent in itself, leading through the avenues of darkest passions, culminates in the direful tragedy of wilful murder.

Taking the Efik by way of example,\* the same dread terror of this secret superhuman power, which they call Ifod, is found pervading them, as it does every African, irrespective of creed or race. As soon as a person has reason to suspect that he has fallen under the spell of the black art (which he immediately does when he is afflicted in mind, body, or estate), the first step he takes is to pay a visit to the Abia Ebok, or local doctor, to remove, cure, or at all events checkmate the evil that has come upon him. Finding the medicines of this man of no avail—in other words, realising that the inimical spirit influence has been too strong for the doctor's spiritual coadjutors—the afflicted one then goes and lays his case before an Abia-Idiong, or witch-doctor, with a more than local reputation, who, having within him the subtlety of the serpent to a greater extent than the former, at once traces the cause to witchcraft.

This fact having been definitely decided, the next step is to detect the enemy who, under cover of secrecy, is slowly and surely accomplishing his fell design. No time is lost by the wily Abia-Idiong in making the unpleasant discovery, and no sooner does he discover than he denounces the vile dastard. Then comes the pathetic and inevitable scene of the poison ordeal, and the curtain once more drops on a tragedy that in every sense is as gruesome as it is painful, not merely because of an innocent life taken, but because all the mighty forces of evil which are at the disposal of humanity have been conjured

up by an imagination which is under the control and at the mercy of the lowest animal instincts.

A head trading woman in charge of an outlying plantation belonging to a very powerful chief happened to commit what in his eyes was a very grievous fault. For this she was severely punished by the loss of the plantation, and, what was of far greater consequence to her, her master's favour. Acting on the impulse of the moment, as these people invariably do, and without calculating the possible contingencies or the eventual consequences, she consulted the inevitable Dibia, to get him to divine for her as to how she was to recover her lost position, and particularly the favour and patronage of the great chief. Yet, unconscious though she was of any evil intention, she had taken the first and most fatal step towards her own doom. The fact of her visit to the Dibia soon leaked out, and was at once only too readily conveyed to the ears of the chief by more than one of her enemies, who, of course, purposely placed upon her motive the false construction that it was the beginning of an attempt upon his life. Denying this, as she was able to do, with a clear conscience, her natural indignation and vehemence were interpreted as proofs of her guilt, so her explanation was not only rejected, but she herself was subjected to further punishment. This consisted in having her ears cut off, and a flogging from each and all of the other women in the household; and, not content with these brutal indignities, she was further sentenced to be chained up and not released until death. But her cruel and insatiable enemies, hankering after the death of their victim, were still not satisfied. So a further report was quickly brought to the chief, that, although chained, the prisoner had set poison for her master, to first of all afflict, and then to destroy him. What was more, that she had called down curses and imprecations on his head, invoking the names of the great men of former generations—his fathers and their fathers before them—to come and remove him from all his earthly wealth and make him as themselves.

Capable and powerful though he was, the chief, fearful of the black art and of his life, believed all these statements, with the result that the unfortunate victim of foul and false



suspicion was chained to a post in the centre of the compound with her feet fastened together; and in this dreadful position she was left without food or drink, and exposed to the sun and all the elements until she died.

Among the Andoni—that small and primitive tribe of fishermen living on the coast between Bonny and Opobo—so strong is the hold, so deadly the fear, which witchcraft has obtained, that a society of protection has been formed amongst them, which is known as Ofiokpo. This society consists of a board or assembly of free-borns in each town, slaves being rigorously excluded, whose object is to condemn and kill any person against whom witchcraft has been proved.

One of the leading members of this society is appointed as representative or care-taker of Ofiokpo, who is esteemed as a deity of proof—the god or father of evidence—one who finds out the fault of another. When sufficient testimony has been collected against any person accused of sorcery, the society at once pass a sentence of death upon him, and, headed by their president, proceed by night to his house, when the latter, who is armed with a big bludgeon, beats the wizard or witch to death.

While this ordeal is going on neither women nor slaves are allowed to be outside their houses, and the body when dead is shared among the members and afterwards eaten. The house is confiscated and all the property sold, in order to provide yams, palm oil, salt, and pepper to cook with the flesh of the deceased, also to buy tombo or rum, which is drunk during the play which follows.

Necessity and the principle of self-defence alone, it appears, is the only explanation that is offered regarding the existence of such a society. And that, from their point of view, it is justified, is evident. For it is a simple and common matter for near relatives—such as brothers, *e.g.*—to accuse each other of this deadly offence. Envy or jealousy, according to my informants, is undoubtedly the first incentive to the underlying principle of suspicion, especially in cases where one member of a family has been more fortunate or grown more wealthy than the others. This evidently supplies sufficient motive to the less fortunate members, who go out of



their way to make out a case against the object of their spleen, at the same time that they endeavour to win over the members of Ofiokpo to their side, so as to effect their wicked purpose.

In the same way it often happens that two great friends go out fishing together, and one of them, either by accident or, it may be, better management, secures a much greater haul of fish than the other. Unfortunately, however, it is an act by which he unconsciously lays up for himself a store of evil that is fraught with danger to his life; for on their return to the town the unlucky one immediately goes and consults the Ojerra-mu-or, or witch-doctor, as to the reason of his friend having obtained a larger haul than himself. This mischief-maker of the deepest dye, who thrives and fattens on the foibles and follies of his companions, and who is ever eager to grasp a fee, at once attributes the cause to magic. So the seed of strife and death is sown, and the warm-hearted friend is suddenly changed into an active enemy who strives his utmost to procure the death of one that until so recently was to him as of his own flesh and blood. Analysing the matter, as I have done, most carefully, there is no question about it, that among this strange and savage people the cannibalistic tendency has also something to say to the existence of witchcraft. For it seems that slaves—even those who are house-born—are frequently accused of the offence, and killed without any previous form of trial or inquiry. This is done by knocking the head of the wretched victim against the wall of every house in the town, and finally against the ancestral monument, at the same time that the reason for doing so is publicly announced as due to witchcraft. The body, in this as in all similar cases, is then divided amongst the household and eaten by them with due ceremony.

One very curious feature about this particular matter is that, as a rule, only Kwa or Ibibio slaves are treated in this way, the Ibo being prized more highly, because they are of greater value, besides being more tractable and amenable to discipline than the former. The society of Ofiokpo is not, however, merely confined to the Andoni, for every town or community in the Delta has its own god-divining and protec-

tion society—mutual and co-operative, but of course under its own local name.

Among the Ogoni, who are on the same level as the Andoni, any one accused of this crime was formerly sent to the Aro Chuku to be tried, the offender being buried alive if found guilty. More recently, however, it has been customary to hang a wizard or a witch, and a certain price is put upon the body. If the family of the deceased pay the amount in question, they are entitled to have his body, which they bury; but if they decline or cannot afford to do so, the body is shared by the community and eaten. Should, however, accused be found not guilty of the charge, the accuser is obliged to pay so heavy a fine, as well as to sacrifice so many goats and fowls, that he and his family are, as a rule, bound to be ruined—ruin, in other words, standing for retribution.

In Brass the natives firmly believe that witches exist, and that certain persons by natural operations—or rather by co-operation with natural forces—possess the power of inflicting disease, injury, or death upon their neighbours. These individuals are divided into two classes—the harmful and the harmless.

The former are said to go out of their houses at night, and to hold meetings with demons and their colleagues, to determine whose life is next to be destroyed. This is done by gradually sucking the blood of the victim through some supernatural and invisible means, the effect of which on the victim is imperceptible to others. Sometimes at nights a large fire is seen in the bush, generally on a tree, when the witches are supposed to be dancing. Such trees are, however, found to be intact at daylight. It is the custom not to suffer witches to live, and the moment certain individuals are suspected, a strict watch is kept over their movements, until adequate proofs are obtained of their guilt, when, regardless of position and connections, they are condemned to die. The death reserved for them is that by fire. A bundle of wood being provided by each house in the town, the condemned are bound hand and foot, placed on the pile, and burnt in a manner similar to that of offering sacrifices in former times. The practice of sorcery or magic by means of evil spirits or

the so-called medicines universally resorted to throughout Africa is strictly forbidden in Brass, and any one found dealing in or practising with them is certain to receive the extreme penalty.

Regarding the second or harmless class of sorcerers, the discovery is said to be only made after death, when a careful examination of the intestines reveals the existence of certain small black objects which, it is popularly believed, are connected with witchcraft—the undeveloped germs, in fact, of the natural element. The corpses of these people are never buried, but placed on the branches of mangrove trees in a locality which is set apart for the purpose.

## CHAPTER II

### AN IBO ASPECT OF WITCHCRAFT

HAVING presented the reader with a brief outline of facts and examples illustrating the popular attitude of the natives in the Delta towards this deadly scourge of their own making, it is now my intention to place before him, in the entire and original sense in which it was given to me, a statement regarding witchcraft as it exists among the Ibo, that was made to me by one Ephraim Agha, a native of Onitsha.

That sorcery exists all over the country, with a force and terror that is all the greater because its deeds are done in secret, is more than true, he says ; but that, notwithstanding the injuries and deaths which it inflicts upon the really innocent, the popular estimate of it is formulated on a false and hypothetical basis, is quite certain. What is still more certain, is that this estimate is the outcome of lost hope and irretrievable despair—the final struggle, in fact, of afflicted spirits struggling, as it were, against the inevitable.

It is far from my intention, he continues, here to assert that the practice of witchcraft is absolutely devoid of such nefarious contrivances as are distinctly detrimental to health and vigour of mind ; but what I intend to convey is, that its pretensions are fabulous and exaggerated. For, notwithstanding its evident possession of certain destructive engines, which by sleight of hand are dexterously administered into the human organism, many of its pretensions are physically impossible.

The following, in popular estimation, are the principal ideas which prevail among the Ibo on this subject of deadly interest.

According to this, there are in existence in every community a combination of witches who are organised for the sole object of perpetrating evil or working mischief upon mankind in general. As regards the formation of movements of this combination, no mystery could be complete, for its secrets are guarded with the jealousy that only the impending fear of death can produce to perfection.

It is said, by the way, that women are invariably members, and that men seldom join this diabolical society. One notable fact, however, in connection with this opinion is that no woman is, as a rule, accused of witchcraft unless she is known to be sterile, or has passed the limit of procreation. The fact of the matter is, that any woman is open to such an accusation so long as there is a masked buffoon to make a charge against her.

The only tangible evidence of the existence of the combination is to be seen in the calamities and deaths that are of such frequent occurrence in every community, which can only in this way be explained.

It is generally believed that the organisation has at its head a chief who is an adept in the magic arts, and who, as such, exercises all the prerogatives and wields the authority due to his rank. It is always a subject of doubt and dispute among the people as to the possibility of a man becoming a wizard. Men are generally exempted because they are initiated into the secrecy whereby it is established, and can better defend themselves than women, who are usually helpless and defenceless.

Besides the special confederation of whom I have spoken, there are in existence other nightly assemblies, which are, however, considered harmless in the popular estimation. These are practically buffoons and dancers who go about the streets at night, masked, from house to house, with the sole object of receiving payment in kind for their dancing, and, except in cases where they are interfered with or intruded on by members who are not initiated, they do no harm whatever.

It is also a popular article of belief that members of the combination have a preternatural insight into everything,



particularly disease, and that by means of this capacity they can subvert and countermand the natural order of things.

When any individual is sick, it is the custom among the people to conceal very closely the nature of the sickness and the whereabouts of the invalid. These precautions are taken solely to prevent interference on the part of witches, who, despite every effort, however, are reputed to become cognisant of all the facts, so that in the event of death the cause of it is invariably attributed to them.

Sometimes it is usual to remove the patients to another locality, in order to escape the clutches of the local society; but even distance does not exempt them from the enchantments of these human demons, who are ubiquitous, and to whose spells no obstacle is impervious. Indeed, even natural phenomena, such, *e.g.*, as inundations caused by rivers, and droughts, are also looked upon as coming within the sphere of their active operations.

There is, too, a belief among the people to the effect that witches are not the creation of God, this being the reason given for His neither interfering with nor punishing them for their evil designs against His own creatures.

The supernatural power of witchcraft is said to be acquired by swallowing a vegetable and poisonous powder which endows those who partake of it with the gift of second sight, that enables them to see what certain people are doing at a distance.

The members of the combination are, as I have already pointed out, under pain of death not to reveal the secrets of its origin, organisation, and powers; and in return for this each member is individually endowed with supernatural powers of operation and metamorphosis. Most of the current information concerning the craft and its practices is, however, purely traditional and presumptive, and must therefore be taken on trust. It is presumed that men and women in olden days, by making experiments in vegetable medicines and poisons, had unconsciously discovered the secrets of this miraculous power. This belief has led to a gross exaggeration of the powers of a combination which is aimed principally at the opulent and powerful members of every community, whose deaths are sought on every available opportunity.

Seeing that every human being is capable of evil, women, as being the weaker vessels, therefore incapable of defending themselves against any attack on their character or persons, are, as a rule, fastened upon as witches. This, however, is a mistake, for although vindictive in their natures they are all the same incapable of executing their desires without the assistance and co-operation of the male sex. No woman is accused of witchcraft without the full consent of her husband and her own family, *i.e.* father, mother, and children, if she has got any. This gives her every opportunity of vindicating her innocence at the same time that it avoids a brawl or fight between the opposing factions. The people who in reality are the most dangerous, and all the more to be feared on that account, are those men who make a practice of dealing in medicines that ostensibly are harmless and inoffensive, but which in reality are virulent poisons; and it is generally admitted that no man will divulge the secrets of this deadly craft for fear of incurring the double vengeance of the witches and of the populace.

The belief is also general that witches can and do change themselves into any kind of bird or animal, and it is not by any means an uncommon occurrence to come across persons who have seen the metamorphosis take place before their very eyes.

Among a people who are naturally superstitious, to whom the ordinary operations or functions of nature are incomprehensible, and who see either danger or death in every simple change of circumstance, no single occurrence can fail to have a cause attributed to it, and seven other causes to boot besides. By operation is meant that no distance is in itself sufficient to impede the spiritual progress of witches, and no barrier sufficiently impregnable to resist their spiritual force, so that they can not only pass through the smallest aperture or crack in a wall, but through the wall itself. This force or element, which they are able to project from their own organisms by virtue of a medicine which is usually deposited in some earthen receptacle or calabash, is capable of inflicting bodily pain or harm on the victim.

The power which enables these witches to project so much

destructive force into space is supposed to be gathered by means of certain virtues extracted from the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms, which are compounded into a powder and carefully kept concealed. Just as in other concerns of life, so concerning this secret craft there is much exaggeration. "Cowards," according to a popular Ibo proverb, "are accustomed when travelling from one place to another, especially during the night, to close their eyes lest they see anything disagreeable or evil befalling them." For they do not consider that as a brave man dies, so dies a coward, and so they die many times over in their minds before their actual death—a saying which recalls Shakespeare's reflection that

Cowards die many times before their death,  
The valiant never taste of death but once.

Thus it is that during a walk their imaginations become excited by fear until every squirrel becomes an elephant, an insignificant piece of cloth a fiery serpent, and every dark corner an abode of diabolical demons.

The above remarks are meant to demonstrate the prevailing ignorance and superstition of the real essence of witchcraft, which is nothing more nor less than a specially organised and unique system of poisoning. There are, it appears, several methods by which this may be done. One of these is by getting to windward of the victim and allowing the poisonous powder to float down upon the wind until it has effected its purpose, or to place it upon the ground over which he is obliged to pass daily or frequently. Another more certain method is to administer it in food or drink in the form of a slow poison and with the connivance of an accomplice. While the popular illusion in ghostly phantoms which prevails has evidently originated in the practice that these poisoners have arranged of waving lights about at night in the thick bush with such adroitness that they are said to be the heads of witches.

Whether inside or outside their own circle, every member of this fraternity is by nature a cannibal—the victims selected being killed, as a rule, by means of the blood-sucking process, which operation is carried out either singly or jointly. This,

which is generally considered to be the most favourite of their methods, is said to be accomplished so skilfully that although the victim operated on feels the pain he is unable to perceive any visible or external cause to account for it, which, notwithstanding, eventually proves fatal to his life.

Another supposed operation by means of which people are spirited away or detained against their wills is that of a species of hypnotism, which, however, is not mental, but supposed to be produced by means of the inevitable drug.

Among themselves sorcerers are believed to entertain, also to accomplish, prodigies, *e.g.* not only can the largest tree be transplanted from one place to another without the slightest effort, but inverted upside down. During the performance of these miraculous feats horrible orgies are held, and on occasions even their own children are ruthlessly sacrificed and eaten.

Members of the combination during their nightly peregrinations are said to emit flame from their heads which is unquenchable, and the existence of which can in no way be accounted for. No words, as you see, can fully express the dense ignorance of the people. In reality, of course, the flame is generated by oil, with which other inflammable substances are mixed. These are mixed together and put into a clay pot, which is perforated with holes and suspended on a pole or the branch of a tree, or carried about by strong, active young men to enable them to see their way in the dark, so as to avoid pursuit.

As far as my experience of witchcraft goes, there are three branches or sections, two of which are offensive or injurious, and one defensive or harmless.

The first of these is called Ogboma, which never loses an opportunity of poisoning members of a community with a facility and secrecy that defy detection. The members of this fraternity clothe themselves inwardly with white and outwardly with black, and whenever they come into contact with the object of their fury or hatred they suddenly expose their inward form, which, being pure white, startles the victim into a state of insensibility that enables the sorcerers to carry their evil intentions into disastrous effect.

The second class is called Amosu, and applies practically



to the witchcraft of the combination that I have endeavoured to describe, which is merciless, especially towards those by whom they have most benefited.

The third, Amosu Ukawu, is purely and simply a defensive measure for self-protection, its poisons being procured and employed solely as antidotes against the diabolical machinations of the two former.

In conclusion, every member of the combination is gifted with the power of stupefying the senses and intelligence of any one outside its pale, which is done by means of the powerful medicine before alluded to. In fact, mere contact with a witch is said to produce the same effect.

It is a saying among our wise men that "the man is free from the influence of witches who has none in his own house." Hence it is customary, before offering a visitor anything to eat or drink, for the host first of all to taste either victuals or liquor in order to assure his guest of the sincerity of his intentions.

In this, the concluding paragraph of Agha's valuable communication, we have not only the explanation of an old-time custom, but the key to a social enigma, which, even with a thorough knowledge of human nature at our command, would be otherwise quite inexplicable. For it is the rude and savage instincts of the animal, the violent antipathy, the vindictive passion of revenge, the hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, and finally in the lust for blood, at the root of which always lurks the insidious venom of suspicion, like a sleuth-hound with its nose on the trail, that in the first instance gave rise to a craft which, if it could see its way clear, would suck dry the life-blood of the people. Knowing these as well as I do, what also is so plainly evident is that, apart from instincts and passions which are ineradicable, the patriarchal system is to a great extent responsible for the existence of witchcraft, creating, as it must of necessity do, so many opportunities—literally preparing the soil, in fact—for jealousies and rivalries. Thus it is that the social atmosphere of a Delta household is not only thick with concealed strife and spite, but alive with sprites who, notwithstanding their supposed spirituality, are as full as they can be



of all the lowest failings that human flesh is heir to. In a word, the ordinary household is nothing but a hotbed of evil passions that, underneath an outwardly calm surface, is seething with mental visions and apparitions that readily take the shape and form of the devouring death fiend.

Without in any way, however, wishing to cross swords with a man of such undoubted intelligence and experience as Agha—himself a native, who has gone into this question most thoroughly and exhaustively—taking the Delta tribes generally, witchcraft is usually spoken of as in two classes: the black or actively offensive, and the white or inoffensive magic, which is only undertaken in self-defence.

## CHAPTER III

### WITCH DOCTORS : (A) THEIR METHODS, (B) THEIR POISONS

#### A. THEIR METHODS

THE Ibo word Dibia, or the Efik Abia, stands for doctor, that is, a person who professes to cure or remedy bodily ills and ailments. This does not necessarily mean that every individual professor is a sorcerer, or diviner, or thought-reader. Thus, *e.g.*, among the Efik we find an Abia Ebok who is merely a physician, and an Abia Idiong who is a diviner or witch doctor. Many of these gentry, however, do, as a matter of fact, combine both functions, and sometimes all three, and these latter, being specially qualified to deal with ghosts and demons, generally manage to establish for themselves reputations that are out of all proportion to their actual attainments, consequently are treated by the people with the greatest fear and respect, as belonging to a fraternity that is not only small and exclusive, but which alone possesses the power of getting into touch with the outside spirit world. And it is this seeming reality which is their sole salvation, and that explains the fact of their existence, and the otherwise inexplicable toleration of the masses. For to the people, these subtle and expert diviners are absolutely indispensable. So, with the fatalism they inherit from Nature, these natives, finding that they cannot do without diviners, make the most and best of them.

Yet this is to some extent inconsistent. The witch doctor not only is capable of dispensing or deputing his powers to ambitious novices, but he is actually known to do so.

Having decided on conferring certain powers on a particular individual, the diviner proceeds to administer to him a potion that has been decocted from various leaves and herbs which are found in the bush. Having made the aspirant drink a portion of it, he then pours a few drops into his eyes and ears, the reputed effect of which is to instil courage into the heart; in other words, to harden that impressionable organ, so that its owner may have neither fear nor scruple to take life, irrespective of age or sex—no difference being made even towards children. This is a point that is worthy of the reader's notice, for under ordinary conditions, and in the domestic life of these people—apart from any intrinsic considerations—children are regarded and treated with great affection both by men and women. So that in attempting the destruction of children, as witchcraft does, it is aiming at all that is best in the social life of the people.

Having filled the aspirant's mind with the power and mysteries of the Great Mother, the master of divination turns him out into the bush all by himself—to contemplation of the mysteries which lie around him, and in communion with his other self.

With his mind open to receive impressions, and his faculties absorbed in a concentrated contemplation of the mystic, Nature speaks to him with a thousand voices, that are but the re-echoes of his own diabolical intentions. So one night of communion with Nature hardens his heart, forming as it does, in reality, the initial ceremony of a career of blood that deals only with the darkest and most terrifying problem of life. But if these voices of Nature so impress this bundle of diabolical emotions, it is not in the least surprising that her silence appeals to him by way of contrast with even still greater force.

In this way, then, face to face with Nature, he is hardened and initiated into the various secrets which it is necessary for him to learn. So, listening attentively to what the different spirits of the trees, plants, and grasses have to tell him, the aspirant soon learns to discriminate between the medicines and forces which have been placed at his disposal. This, however, is only one aspect of the weird and grim initiation—the

internal or emotional aspect which evolves from his own inner but disturbed consciousness. But there is another, the external and more tangible, side to it, which brings him into actual contact with the animal life of the forest, that, in combination with the fears which he himself has conjured up out of the hell of his imaginations, makes it all the more terrifying and terrible an ordeal. All the more so, because it seems to him as the realisation of his inmost thoughts, and all that has been told him; therefore proof positive and infallible that spirits in various forms and embodiments, vegetal and animal, have visited him. Bound hand and foot, morally as well as physically, he becomes a prey not only to his own hideous fears, but to the animal life which teems all round and frequently all over him,—the driver ants, active, combative, and always on the move, whom nothing short of fire and water can stop once they set themselves in motion, pouring like a black torrent, every single atom of which is instinct with fierce vitality, through and over every obstacle; the restless red-tree ants, that, although always busy in the construction of their leafy domiciles, have yet time enough left to sting; the large and loathsome stink ants, that fill the air with their offensive effluvia; the bush cats, leopards, iguanas, and snakes, always on the look-out for victims with which to appease their hungry appetites. That the experiences which in this way befall him are often diabolical enough to upset the nerves of the bravest and strongest man, can well be imagined. So that when a novice emerges from the hellish ordeal with nerves shaken and courage intact, having undergone a probation so exacting, a process so hardening and sterilising that it freezes up any of the milk of human kindness with which he may have been possessed into the cold hard ice of a deadly antipathy, he is well qualified to become a fiend incarnate, who gloats over and revels in the flesh and blood of his own kith and kin.

#### B. THEIR POISONS

There are, so all my various informants have instructed me, several kinds of poisons which are believed by the people to be in existence, but the constituents of which, as being

difficult to reconcile with reason and knowledge, are therefore of extremely dubious character.

Medicine men, it is popularly estimated, are thoroughly cognisant of the different constituents which compose the three principal divisions of natural objects. Consequently they are invariably applied to for poisons of any kind whatsoever. For the belief in their potentialities, as suitable for the purpose for which they have been prepared, is very general.

Poisons are, as a rule, prepared by drying and reducing various vegetal properties into either powders or potions by mixing them with water; or from fluids—the gall, bile, and such like—that have been extracted from certain wild animals or reptiles. There are four different classes of poisons, namely, (1) those which are applied internally; (2) those which are used externally; (3) those which are applied by invisible means; (4) those which affect the senses.

#### 1. *Internal Poisons.*

It is commonly believed that poisons which are not taken internally are not invariably mortal. Hence every father advises his son to be circumspect and vigilant of his throat. Poisons of this kind are usually prepared and compounded with an admixture of the galls of animals, particularly of leopards, pythons, lizards, and a special sort of fish. These compounds are, as a rule, used as irritants, for the express purpose of exciting vomit. Vegetal matter is also indispensable in their preparation, for in this way they are reduced to powder and carefully preserved. Some of them are said to be so powerful that a drop as from a needle's point is sufficient to cause death.

#### 2. *External Poisons.*

These are always used by laying them on or across the path which is daily resorted to by the individual for whom they are intended. It is usual, during the process, for the poisoner to express in words thoughts such as these, "May he be lamed," "May he be filled with blood," "May his back or spine break," and of course others equally malevolent. These invocations, it is firmly believed, are tempered with the various properties of the medicine which is purposely and assiduously procured by medicine-men for such ends. These poisons are



also sprinkled on the roofs of houses, or over the mat or stool on which the victims sleep.

### 3. *Communicable Poisons.*

That is, those which can be communicated by invisible methods.

These are procured from or made with the spines of certain animals, porcupines more especially, compounded with potash, iron filings, and other inorganic matters, which are reduced to a powder. In this form they are supposed to be communicated invisibly with such celerity and exactness against a person, that blood poisoning supervenes. It is also believed that there are certain roots, barks, and leaves of trees that, after due preparation, are mixed with other properties extracted from animals, particularly those with stings. These too, it appears, can be despatched from a considerable distance, in a manner which is absolutely imperceptible, against the person of the victim selected. It is to this cause that leprosy and sores of various kinds are usually attributed.

### 4. *Soporific Poisons.*

These are said to be extracted from the tails of crocodiles and scorpions' stings, mixed with vegetal matter. The mode of administering them is to rub a certain amount of the poison on to the hand, or upon a walking stick or piece of wood, and when the sorcerer is close to his victim he merely waves the poisoned-covered object before him, and in this way communicates its virtues into his head; the immediate effect of which is to make his head whirl, his senses reel, and to benumb all his nerves and sensibilities. Imperfect as this account is, it is at least sufficiently luminous to show that although in reality the real mischief is perpetrated by means of those poisons which are administered in food or drink, there is, according to popular estimation, as much reliance placed in all the other forms. And the explanation of this, as we saw in regard to the Ancestral Medicines in Section V., is simple in the extreme. For the entire operation is, of course, demoniacal.

In making a review of the entire question, certain salient features, it is quite manifest, have been more in evidence. These are: (1) Witchcraft, according to native belief, is not

in any sense a direct or indirect creation or the handiwork of the Supreme God. For this reason, therefore, he neither punishes nor interferes with the people for the dreadful evils and enormities committed under its potential and prolific ægis. (2) The metamorphosis of witches into animals, as the work of sorcerers, is altogether supernatural; or, to describe it more accurately, beside and outside Nature. (3) The prodigies of witches are unnatural topsy-turveydom, an inversion of the natural order of things and events—such, for example, as eating their own offspring, turning trees upside down, etc. (4) The killing and eating of children, of their own flesh and blood, forms a marked contrast with the fact that, under normal social conditions, children are not only esteemed with much affection, but regarded in a spiritual and creative sense, as divine and ancestral pledges. (5) No women, unless they are known to be barren, or prevented by age from bearing, are ever accused of witchcraft, proving again, as previously explained, the undeniable and God-like sanctity of maternity.



## APPENDICES





## APPENDIX A

### A GLIMPSE INTO THE GRAMMATICAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE VARIOUS TONGUES

IT is not my intention to spend much time over the solution of the linguistic problem. For, however valuable it may be from an anthropological standpoint to arrive at the origin of these different tribes, it is of much greater value to obtain a true and faithful picture of the moods and modes of thought in which they have lived and are still living.

Commencing with, and adhering for the most part practically and principally to the Ibo as the most important and influential tongue, if we make an examination of certain words, taken at random, between the dialect as spoken by the "Ndoke" and "Ngwa" clans and that in use in the Niger at and below Onitsha, we will find that while certain words coincide exactly, others again are totally dissimilar. Thus, *e.g.*, while the under-mentioned words—

|             |              |                |
|-------------|--------------|----------------|
| Dog—n'kita  | Meat—anu     | Morning—ututu  |
| Cloth—akwa  | Bad—n'jor    | Come—bia       |
| Tree —osisi | Fire—oku     | Head—issi      |
| Chief—eze   | Fruit—nkpulu | A lie—okwu-asi |

are identical, these again which follow are quite distinct :—

| English. | Ibo.     | Niger Ibo. |
|----------|----------|------------|
| Thread   | ili      | owulu      |
| Language | okwu     | asusu      |
| Street   | ama      | ilo        |
| Thief    | onyi     | oshi       |
| Thunder  | abe igwe | akpala     |
| Tortoise | mbai     | nbekuru    |
| Monkey   | wekah    | enwe       |
| Rubber   | ubulom   | eso        |

On the other hand, a careful comparison, such as I have made between these two dialects, shows us that there are numerous

words, including the numerals, which if not the same are, practically speaking, similar, a few examples of which are here given :—

| English.  | Ibo.    | Niger Ibo. |
|-----------|---------|------------|
| Day       | ubochi  | ubosi      |
| Go        | ba'ah   | naba       |
| Palm tree | nku     | nkwu       |
| Cow       | ehi     | efi        |
| Poison    | msi     | nsi        |
| Picture   | onyinyo | inyinyo    |
| Shadow    | onyinyo | inyinyo    |

Among words of this description, it is quite evident that the differences are merely superficial, and easily accounted for by former and varying conditions of acquirement or use that have prevailed in the different localities. Thus "awun," the sun, and "owan," the moon, of the Ndoke clan, have become on the Niger "anwu" and "onwa." "Wan-afu," a free-born, is similarly transposed to "nwafuh."

In the same way the following letters are interchangeable : "r" with "l" or "n," "l" with "n," "s," "sh," and "gh" with "f" or "r," "u" with "o," and "a" and "d" with "t," as the under-mentioned examples will illustrate :—

| English. | Ibo.     | Niger Ibo. |
|----------|----------|------------|
| Sheep    | aturu    | atutu      |
| Water    | mini     | miri       |
| House    | ulo      | unoh       |
| Pillow   | ohi-hisi | ofi-isi    |
| Grass    | aghigha  | afia       |
| Nation   | oha      | ora        |
| Children | umu      | omo        |
| Paddle   | amara    | amala      |

But in addition to transposition and interchanging between letters of the same class, which is done indiscriminately and without adhering to any regular rules, certain rules are observed : (1) vowels are not considered ; (2) letters are also inserted, affixed, prefixed, or omitted, either to suit local conditions or for sake of euphony ; but although we are purposely avoiding this branch of the subject, it will be necessary, even from the basis on which the work has been constructed, to glance rapidly at some of its leading characteristics, in order more particularly to confirm the fact that the languages in question are, in every sense of the word, primitive or natural. For, as we shall see, although they have a distinct grammatical structure that is decidedly capable of much improvement, they are, as a careful analysis of them will

demonstrate, extremely simple, and, from a civilised point of view, defective in their construction.

In the first place, then, comparing their alphabet with our own, the prevailing vowel sounds are "a" as in "father," or "a" as in "fall"; "e" as in "let," or "e" as in "there"; "i" as in "see," or as in "bid"; "o" as in "go," "o" as in "for"; "u" as in "bull," "u" as in "schedule"; "k," on the whole, is the prevailing letter, "c" and "x" altogether deficient, while "j," "l," "v," and "z" are less used than the remaining consonants, especially in Efik and Ibibio. As regards their pronunciation, the letters "b" and "p" are sometimes confused, "b" and "m" and "d" and "n" are frequently combined, and while "g" is always hard, "h" is guttural. Speaking of these tongues collectively, the general intonation is, on the whole, distinctly soft and pleasing to the ear, the alternation between the vowels and consonants being very evenly distributed.

In the second place, as regards their roots, it is quite evident that these are either more or less formed from, or at least identical with, the imperative singular of verbs, and in their primitive form they always commence with a consonant, and are principally monosyllables and dissyllables. It is possible in the Efik dialect to arrange these primitives in five classes, which are distinguishable by the order of their vowels and consonants, as in the following examples:—

| (1)        | (2)         | (3)       |
|------------|-------------|-----------|
| Ma—desire  | Dep—buy     | Mia—beat  |
| Ja—chew    | Bat—count   | Tua—cry   |
| Fe—fly     | Ket—aim.    | Foi—pinch |
| (4)        | (5)         |           |
| Biak—pain  | Bana—adorn  |           |
| Buak—mix   | Bara—answer |           |
| Tuak—knock | Duri—spread |           |

Nouns are, as a rule, constructed from these roots by prefixes; thus "ma," love; "ima," love; "bok," feed; "ubok," a hand; "no," give; "eno," a gift.

Nouns have no regular declension for gender or case, but when they do undergo any change or inflection this usually takes place by prefixing "m" or "n" to the root. Thus, *e.g.*, "aubong," a headman, plural "mbong"; "ikpat," a foot, feet "nkpai"; "ete," father, and "eka," mother, plural "mete," "mekai." Sometimes, however, the plural is only indicated by the accompanying adjectives, as in the following example, "eti eno," a good gift; "nti eno," good gifts.

In the same manner the cases of nouns are indicated by the position only, the nominative preceding the verb, and the objective and possessive following it.

The adjectives, like the nouns, are also formed chiefly from the verb roots, as, for example, "kpong," leave alone; and "ikpong," solitary; "nyan," stretch out; "anyan," long.

Frequently the same word serves both as noun and adjective. Thus while "ifu" stands for idleness, and "ubwene" for poverty, "owo ifu" means an idle man, and "owo ubene" a poor man.

A particularly noticeable characteristic, not only of Efik but of all these tongues, is repetition or reiteration. In this simple way, for instance, a noun repeated is at once transformed into an adjective. So "mbat," mud, and "mbom," pity, becomes "mbat-mbat," muddy, and "mbom-mbom," pitiful.

Degrees of comparison are similarly expressed, "eti," good, being, when reiterated, very good; and when followed by "akan," extremely good; or preceded by "ata," superlatively so.

In much or precisely the same way an intensive or frequentative form is constructed. Thus the root "no," give, as "nono" is to give entirely; "sua," hate, as "asasua" is he hates deeply; "bara," blow, "ababara," blow strongly.

Adjectives similar to nouns have no inflection except for the plural, and then not regularly. This is formed in the same manner by the prefix "m" or "n," or by a change of the initial vowel, as, *e.g.*, "idiok," bad, plural "midiok"; "eti," good, plural "nti"; "eren," a male, "iren," males; "afia," white, "mfia."

Adverbs, too, which are generally constructed from verbs, nouns, or adjectives, are likewise formed on the same principle of doubling the root. Thus we find that "anyananyan," lengthwise, and "taktak," utterly, are merely the repetition of "anyan," long, and "tak," perish. Some adverbs, however, take the pronominal prefixes, as well as the prefix auxiliaries, of moods and tenses of the verbs to which they belong. Thus "nyung," also; "ami nnyung nka," I also went.

The pronouns, unlike the nouns and adjectives, are not so very defective in number, and show a greater degree of inflection. They are divided as follows: personal, possessive, reflexive, relative, interrogative, and demonstrative. The personal are as follows: first singular nominative, "ami"; possessive and objective, "mi," plural "nyin"; second singular nominative, "afu," possessive, "fu," objective, "fi," plural "mfu" or "mbfu"; third singular nominative and objective, "enye," and possessive, "esie," plural "mo"; the possessives are "okimmo," mine; "okuomo," thine; and "esiemo," his own; plural "ekenyin," ours; "edembufu," yours; and "ekemo," theirs. The reflexives are: singular,

"idemmi," myself, "idemfu" and "idemesie," plural "idemnyin," "idemmbufu," and "idemmo." The relatives are "emi," "eke," and "se," who, which, what. The interrogatives are "anie," who; "efe" or "ewe," which; and "su" or "nsu," what.

Finally, the demonstratives are "emi" and "odo," this and that, and "efen," "eken," and "ewen," another, others. In addition, however, to these are "imo" and "mimo," pronouns that are peculiar to Efik, and employed only, or, as a rule, when repeating conversations or reporting speeches, as when, for example, a messenger relates word for word any dialogue which has passed between himself and others. It is very evident that these pronouns are useful in avoiding a too frequent repetition of the personal pronouns, and in this way tend to simplify the sense that is meant to be conveyed.

There are no articles, but "a," the indefinite, is often expressed by the numeral "one."

With regard to the prepositions, while there are only a few in Efik and Ibibio, Ibo has a goodly number. In this latter tongue, however, the ubiquity of the word "na" is particularly noticeable. For not only does it figure very frequently as a preposition, standing as it does for about, at, from, in, on, to, and compounded with "ive," meaning above, and with "ititi," amid, but it is employed as the adverb "also," and as the conjunction "and," besides being used in the former case, with other words, to signify in, on, to, with, etc. In the same way in Efik "ye," which means with, also implies and, and "ke" is used in the various senses of for, by, from, to, in, into, and out of. Spoken in their own dialects, the meaning of these prepositions is more clearly defined by the context.

The conjunctions also, although tolerably numerous both in Efik and Ibo, do not number among them a single specimen, not even "na" or "ye," which expresses the same sense of connection that "and" does, these being employed more in connecting nouns; verbs and sentences being joined in Efik, for example, by "ndien," then.

The numerals are reckoned by the Efik in divisions of five, ten, fifteen, and twenty, only the first five, also nine, ten, fifteen, and twenty, being separately designated, while the rest are either combinations or repetitions of these, very similar in their construction of the Roman numeral lettering. So from one to five are "ket," "iba," "ita," "inang," "itiun," and "itioket," six, is five and one. Similarly "itieba," seven, is five and two; "itiata," eight, is five and three; "osuket," nine; "duup," ten; "suupket," eleven; "duupeba," twelve; and so on to "ifut," fifteen; "ifuriket," sixteen; and so on again to "edip," twenty; "edip-



yeket," twenty-one; and in this way it repeats up to "aba," forty; "ata," sixty; "anang," eighty; and "ikie," a hundred.

"Osuket," nine, is quite an exceptional expression, which seemingly is altogether peculiar to the Efik. Meaning, as it does, "one remaining," it is suggestive of a person counting yams or other articles of produce, while another is keeping a tally or account of the number. Throwing two at a time, at the ninth throw the former cries "osuket," as a warning that the following throw will be a tally—of twenty in this case, but ten when counted in singles—when the score is marked up. This process consists of making notches on a stick, or of counting with rods, etc., each notch or rod being equivalent to a tally, but does not occur at "ifurenang," nineteen, which is a compound of fifteen and four, indeed, it enters into no combination, "edipyeosuket" being twenty-nine, and "edipyifurenang," thirty-nine, or twenty and nineteen. The ordinals, which are not very complete, are as follows: "akpa," first; "udiana akpa," second, or, as it is literally expressed, "the one next to the first." After this they are indicated by employing the verb "oyäkhä," which fills up or completes the sense that is meant to be conveyed with the cardinal, as, *e.g.*, "oyäkhä-ita," the third; "oyäkhä-inan," the fourth, etc.

In addition to these, there are in Efik two other complete sets of numerals that are quite systematically expressed, of which English has but the rudiments. According to this system, all aggregates are formed by the addition of the prefix "mb" to the cardinals, as, *e.g.*, "mbiba," the two or both; "mbita," all three; "mbinang," all four; "mbitiun," all five, and so on all through; and in a similar manner, by prefixing "ika," thus "ikaba," "ikata," "ikanang," "ikotiun," twice, thrice, four times, etc.

The other set is composed of adverbial numerals, which are thus formed: once, "inikiet"; twice, "ikaba"; thrice, "ikata"; four times, "ikanan"; five times, "ikotiun"; six times, "iko-tiokiet," and so on up to a hundred.

A further investigation of and comparison between the numerals of the various tongues is distinctly deserving of attention. For while in certain cases the actual words which stand for them, as well as the systems upon which they are constructed, differ to some degree, there are again in other directions instances of a decided resemblance if not connection, but this is outside our present province. I must, however, draw the reader's attention to the fact that the Efik, as indeed do most of these natives, reckon also by means of signs. According to this natural method, a finger or fingers held up represent the actual numbers. A hand clenched means five, and along with one up to four fingers, from

six to nine, both hands being clasped for ten. A finger is again added for eleven, and so on up to fifteen, for which the arm is bent and the hand touches the shoulder. Twenty is signified by waving a finger in front of the body, and the reckoning proceeds as before until thirty is reached, when the hands are clapped and a finger waved. For forty, two fingers are waved, and at fifty the hands are once more clapped, and in the same way the remaining fingers up to a hundred are signalled, when the closed fist is waved and the simple sum of addition comes to an end.

Returning once more to the five classes of verb roots, with the exception of the first, derivations are constructed from all of them by the addition either of a syllable or a vowel. In the second and third of these the addition is usually that of a vowel, which, when "re" is affixed to it, at once reverses the sense of the word. So "wan," twist or coil; "wana" or "wanga," coiled; "wangare," uncoiled.

"Fuk," cover; "fukha," covered; "fukhare," uncovered; "buk," gather up; "bukha," gathered up; "bakhade" (or "re"), divide or distribute.

"Dian," join or fix; "diana," fixed; "dianare," unfixed, *i.e.* separate, also depart.

In the fifth class certain verbs alter the final vowel, and in this way arrive at the passive voice; thus "duri," lay or spread; "duro," laid; "durore," unlay or take off; "bere" or "siri," close, shut; "bere" or "sere," closed; "berere" or "serere," unclosed.

Words of the third class, however, in adding a syllable change their meaning but do not become either reversive, passive, or reflexive. Thus "bia," gossip, tell-tales, becomes "biana" or "bianga," meaning befool, cheat, deceive, trick; "sue" or "sune," abuse, curse, revile, as "suene" or "sudi" is disgrace, shame, affront; "sua," hate, dislike; "suana," strew, scatter, disperse; and "sia," sneeze; "siam," suck teeth. With regard to this class, it is impossible to trace numbers of the words to their primitives, while many of those of the other classes, it is evident, form no derivatives, although in Efik, as in all these tongues, the capacity of the language admits of such construction. The conjugation of the verbs is practically if not entirely a matter of prefixes. These which, in the form of letters, are used to denote persons, and as syllables or auxiliary verbs, the moods and tenses, invariably become incorporated with the root-word. The pronominal prefixes are as follows: "M" or "n" for the first singular, "i" for the plural; "a," "o," or "e," in agreement with the radical vowel, for the second and third singular, and always "e" for the plural. One noticeable feature about them is that

they entirely nullify the use of the pronouns, which would otherwise have to be employed; thus, for example, "da," bring; "nda," I bring or brought; "ada," thou, he; "ida," we; "eda," they bring or brought.

The tense of the verb which is most generally used, and particularly in a conversational or narrative sense, as in the example given, is the aorist, which is employed somewhat promiscuously, either for the present or the past. The present definite is formed by the prefix "ma," "me," or "mo," in accord with the root or accented vowel, and the past definite by "ka," "ke," or "ko," as follows: "Nam, do mmanam," I am doing; "amanam," thou, he, etc.; "imanam," we; and "emanam, ye or they are doing; "nkanam," I did; "akanam," "ikanam," "ekanam," thou, he, we, and they did.

The future is formed by "ye" and "di," thus "nyenam" and "ndinam," I shall or will do; "eyenam" and "edinam," thou, he, etc.

The conditional mood is formed by "me," if, and "kpe," might, as, *e.g.*, "nkpanam," I might do; "me nkpanam," if I might do; "akpanam," thou, he might do; while, finally, the infinitive takes "ndi" as prefix, thus "ndinam," to do.

The assumption of the negative form, the capacity for which is possessed practically by every verb, is a feature deserving of attention. This, as a rule, is done by adding the suffix "ke" to the primitive, or, as sometimes happens, by altering it to "ge," "he," "ha," or "ho," so as to fit it in with the word. Further, the pronominal prefixes of the second and third persons of both numbers are changed into "u" for the second and into "i" for all the others. So "dep," buy, alters to "ndepke," I bought not; "udepke," thou; "idepke," he, we, you, they bought not. In the same way, with the exception of the imperative, which becomes prohibitive, other parts of the verb assume the negative. Thus "kudep," do not buy; "nkudep," I must not buy; "okudep," he must not buy; "ikudep," we must not, etc.; "ta," chew; "tuka," do not chew; "ntaha," I chew or chewed not; "utaja," thou; "itaha," we, etc.; "no," I bestow; "nnoho," I bestowed not; "unoho," thou; "inoho," he, etc.

It will be necessary now for a few moments to contrast these grammatical methods of the Efik and Ibibio with those of the Ibo. A comparison between the two makes it at once evident that while there is practically little or no difference in the construction of these, or in fact of any of the other tongues, there are certain features that it will be as well to call attention to. In the first place, although, as in the Efik, the primitives can be arranged into five classes, thus:—

|                                    |                                 |                             |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (1)<br>Sit—no<br>Go—ga             | (2)<br>Await—dor<br>Prick—gudor | (3)<br>Kill—bue<br>Come—bia |
| (4)<br>Convey—wegar<br>Adhere—Kpam | (5)<br>Learn—mota<br>Know—mara  |                             |

there is a great deficiency of primitives in classes 2 and 4, the majority belonging to the other three; and, further, it is noticeable that many of these are dissyllabic, such, *e.g.*, as “bibie,” correct; “doie,” correct; “kpaso,” disturb; “kpado,” squeeze; “isota,” obtain; “datsi,” obstruct; “somp,” butt.

Similar to Efik, nouns are often constructed from verbs by prefixes of letters or syllables, thus: “ku-ume,” breathe, “Iku-ume,” breath; “kpobe” or “mabe,” calm, “nkpobe” or “nmabe,” calmness; “suka,” condense, “nsuka,” condensation; “ma-ikpe,” condemn, “di-ima-ikpe,” condemnation; “kive,” consent, “ukwe,” consent; “gho,” sow, “agho,” crop; “gugo,” coax, “ogugo,” coaxer. Or the prefix used is an entire word in itself, with a meaning of its own, such as “ihinye,” thing. So “yiri,” resemble, as “ihinye-yiri” becomes resemblance.

Sometimes a suffix is employed in addition to the prefix, as, *e.g.*, “bue,” to grow stout or to swell; “abuba,” fat. Again, we find that nouns are also formed from verbs, not only by a prefix, but by a doubling of the root. So “ke,” create, develops into “okeke,” creator, while creature is “nke-akereke”; the word for creation, “uwadum,” being, curiously enough, quite different, and derived from “uwa,” world. Sometimes, however, the initial letter of the verb root is repeated, as in the case of “mesi,” complete, “mmesi,” completeness; but at other times, in addition to the ordinary prefix, the pronoun “onye,” who, is used in the sense of “one who”; thus “dozi,” compose, “onye-ndozi,” a composer.

Nouns are also formed from the verb by the alteration of the middle vowel, as, for instance, “nzozo,” conceal, “nzuzo,” concealment; or by changing the initial vowel, as “iriri,” cord, “eriri,” a cord; or, again, by that of the final vowel, “bawo,” crack, “bawa,” a crack; or, yet again, by both, as, *e.g.*, “nu-anu,” rejoice, “anona,” rejoicing; and adjectives also are constructed on a similar principle by changing the initial consonant of the verb; so “sedebe,” conciliate, as “medebe” is conciliatory.

But while, as in the following cases,

|                                        |
|----------------------------------------|
| Nri—nourish and nourishment            |
| Otutu—compare and comparison           |
| Zatsa—clarify and cleanness, or purity |
| Ridicule—nkotsa                        |
| Lean—debere                            |



verbs and nouns are identical ; in others, as in the under-mentioned, they are quite different :—

|                   |                      |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| Debere—preserve   | Osebruwa—preserver   |
| Zi or ziri—seed   | Mkpuru—seed          |
| Mara—serve        | Odibo—servant        |
| Nta—hunt          | Ebenu—hunter         |
| Meta—execute      | Obú-madu—executioner |
| Tsi or otsi—laugh | Mu or amu—laughter   |
| Zo—content        | Idsu-afo—contentment |
| Diriri—continue   | Onodu—continuance    |
| Ke—cord           | Udo—cord             |

So, although the prevailing method of noun formation is from the verb root, adjectives are also resorted to, usually by the similar means of prefixes, thus : “di-nara,” cool, “idi-nwa-nara,” coolness ; “di-ogo,” decent, “ogo,” decency—or by affixing another word to the adjective, as : “nne,” true, “nne-oku,” truth, *i.e.* true word.

On the other hand, in spite of the fact that nouns are, as a rule, formed from verbs, instances occur in which verbs have been constructed out of nouns ; thus, *e.g.*, we find that “makunye,” consort, is formed from “yi,” a consort ; “baghara,” forgive, from “ghara,” forgiveness ; “mekwa,” repeat, from “kwa,” repetition ; “dike,” stretch, from “ike,” strength ; “la-na-iyì,” destroy, from “iyi,” destruction ; “go-agogo,” celebrate, from “agogo,” celebration ; “te-nzu,” chalk, *i.e.* smear with chalk, from “nzu,” chalk. Similarly, adjectives are also formed from nouns by a syllabic prefix, thus : “ofia” or “ohia,” a bush, “di-ohia” or “di-ofia,” bushy ; “ntatsie,” comfort, “di-ntatsie,” comfortable ; “afia” or “ahihia,” grass, “di-ofia” or “di-ohia,” grassy.

Sometimes, however, the same word represents both noun and adjective, or adjective and adverb ; thus, “enwu” stands for brilliancy and bright, “ngwa” for briskness and brisk, “àbuba” for fat, “ogologo” or “ogonogo,” long and length, and “boru-bor” for frequent, while frequently is expressed by “mbe-odo.”

Another feature which is also noticeable is that the agent or personal noun is at times constructed from the object, or abstract noun, by the utilisation of the pronoun “onye,” one who ; thus, while “ero” or “iro” is enmity, “onye-iro” develops into an enemy, *i.e.* one who bears enmity.

These principles are not, of course, confined to Ibo or Efik any more than they are to one of the other tongues, but, as is only natural, are peculiar in a greater or lesser degree to all of them—a fact, however, which does not support the theory regarding the unity of their origin with any greater significance than does the fact that the evolution of their religions has been identical, as



primitive religion all the world over has similarly been. But even with the former fact thrown in, a comparison, for instance, of Efik with Ibo reveals the experience that there are a few, but not many, words in common between them. In like manner there is little similarity between Ijo and Ibo, although racially the tribes speaking the former have undoubtedly intermingled with the latter. But although these dissimilarities would seem to point to either a difference of origin or variations and submersions such as have been alluded to in Part I., there are, for instance, certain aspects of resemblance—quite apart from grammatical construction—not only between Ibo and Niger Ibo, but between the latter and the Jekri or Bini dialects, which most certainly must be attributed to former associations and connections. And this reasonable conclusion is all the more justified by a comparison on the triangular method, which a reference to any three dialects in the Delta will effectually demonstrate.

To give a notable and at the same time average example : if we take Jekri, Igara, and Ibo, similar words (as is only to be expected, connected as both are with Yoruba) are found in Jekri and Igara ; yet words in which Ibo and Igara coincide are altogether dissimilar in Jekri, while those in which Jekri and Ibo are identical have in Igara a distinct and separate name. As an illustration of this, for example, both in Jekri and Igara “*ēju*” is an eye, “*ojiji*” is a shadow, and “*ewo*” or “*owo*” a hand ; in Ibo the corresponding words are “*anya*,” “*onyinyo*,” and “*akah*.”

On the other hand, while the Ibo and Igara for goat is “*ewu*” and “*ewo*,” and for water “*miri*” or “*mili*,” the Jekri word for the former is “*ekeregebe*” and for the latter “*omi*.”

Again, although it is possible in all three tongues to find a decidedly radical resemblance, as, *e.g.*, in the following :—

| English. | Jekri. | Igara.            | Ibo.               |
|----------|--------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Nose     | imo    | imo(h)            | imi                |
| War      | ogu    | ogu               | ogu                |
| Dream    | ola    | ulu <i>or</i> ona | nlo                |
| Breath   | emo    | emimi             | iku-ume            |
| Morning  | ...    | odudu             | ututu              |
| House    | inoni  | unyi              | nloh <i>or</i> ulo |

it is equally evident that the differences are more marked and in much greater proportion, according to the under-mentioned examples :—

| English. | Jekri.      | Igara.             | Ibo.               |
|----------|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Fowl     | egebele-aja | ajule              | ukukuobi           |
| Soul     | ukpen       | edoh <i>or</i> ibi | nkpulobi           |
| Doctor   | ewo         | obocho             | dibia              |
| Head     | origho      | oji                | issi <i>or</i> isi |

But these remarks are, as has already been pointed out, applicable generally. For, however careful and analytical the comparison, and irrespective of the languages, it will be found that, except in those affiliated groups, such, for example, as those of Ibani, Okrika, New Calabar, and Brass, which are derivable from Ijo, and of Jekri, Sobo, Igabo, whose parent stock is Bini, the differences altogether preponderate. More than this, it is evident that even between the dialects themselves many words are entirely different. Yet here and there, of course, it is quite possible to detect certain resemblances which are relics, no doubt, of former associations or connections, thus :—

| English.     | Ibo.  | Andoni.  | Efik.   | Brass.    | Ibani.     | Okrika.    | New Calabar. | Ogbayan. | Jekri. |
|--------------|-------|----------|---------|-----------|------------|------------|--------------|----------|--------|
| Eye          | anya  | ...      | enyin   | toro      | torongbolo | torongboló | torongbo     | arein    | eju    |
| Elephant     | eyin  | enin     | enin    | bela      | bila       | billa      | bila         | ...      | ...    |
| Hippopotamus | otobo | ...      | isantem | otoba     | atobo      | otobo      | olobo        | ...      | ...    |
| House        | uloh  | ule      | ufok    | wari      | wari       | wari       | wari         | ...      | inoni  |
| Ivory        | odu   | odu-enim | ...     | odu       | odu        | odu        | odu          | ...      | ...    |
| Country      | nba   | amu      | idut    | ama       | ama        | ama        | ama          | ...      | aja    |
| Fire         | oku   | ...      | ikan    | feni      | fini       | finé       | fini         | ...      | una    |
| Foot         | uku   | ukot     | ukut    | buo       | buo        | buwo       | bo           | walajika | esen   |
| Face         | isu   | deteo    | isü     | torokubri | fuwara     | toro       | toro         | ...      | ...    |
| River        | ehere | ...      | akpa    | toru      | toro       | toro       | toro         | oobe     | ero    |
| Hand         | akka  | ...      | ubok    | bara      | bara       | bara       | bara         | awunum   | ewo    |
| Head         | issi  | ubo      | ibunt   | tebe      | sibi       | tebe       | sibi         | emu      | origho |
| Canoe        | ubo   | ndei     | ubüm    | aro       | aru        | tuminiaró  | aro          | ...      | oko    |

It is quite unnecessary, consonant at least with the object of the book, to make any further or more elaborate investigation than has already been made; for, in going as far as we have gone, those specific features which have previously been called attention to will have been noticed, although in addition to these the reader will find it useful to make a note of the two following points. Firstly, that while in the affiliated dialects words occasionally differ, among those tongues which are for the most part further removed from each other they happen to be similar, and in some cases identical, as, *e.g.*, a canoe, the Andoni "ndei" being quite distinct from the Efik "ubum," which is from the same root as the Ibo "ubo," as well as different from the Ijo "aro"; and leopard, which is "siri" or "sere" in Ibani and New Calabar, being "kuronama" in Brass. Secondly, that the same word in different tongues sometimes represents an altogether dissimilar idea or article, thus: "amu" in Andoni means country and in Ogbayan water; "enyin," an eye in Efik, is "enyi" or "eyin," a friend, in Ibo; "ukpen" is a soul or spirit in Jekri, while "ukpon" in Efik is the shadow of a person, also the soul. So too "egugu," used on the Niger at Onitsha and vicinity, means an idol or sacred symbol containing a spirit—said to be an avenger who makes his appearance forty days after the death of a chief only; as "egungu," among the Jekri, is employed in a general sense to express a ghost; and a very similar Niger-Ibo word, "ngugu," stands for a head of tobacco, a bundle, or a parcel. This word "egugu," however, is not a pure Ibo word, but is said to be derived from the Yoruba word "egugu," which means the spirit of a dead man, and was introduced into the English language in its present corrupt form, "Ju-Ju," by some of the slaves who were freed by Englishmen during the period which immediately succeeded the abolition of slavery. Few if any words, however, are common to all the tongues or dialects. Take the word for water as one which in every sense ought to be the same. In the Ibo it is "miri," "mini," or "mili," in Andoni "mu," in Efik "mon," in Jekri "omi," in Igara "mili," in Ibani "okrika," in New Calabar "mingi," in Brass "mindi," and in Ogbayan "mu."

In this one instance only—that is, within my knowledge—the word is near enough to suggest a derivation from the same root which is similar, if not identical, to the Egyptian word "moya," the Coptic "mo," and the Arabic "ma." Similarly, in the Ibo word "gutsie" or "kutsie," which means shut up, and "kutsie-onu," to be silent, there is also traceable the same root which is to be found in the Egyptian word "iskut" and the Arabic "uskut." Curiously enough, too, the Efik word for love, "ma," is very similar to the old Coptic "mai," beloved; while the

Ibo word "ora," a nation, and the Efik "oruk," species, correspond with the English "race," as also do the Efik "ka" and the Ibo "ga" with our word "go." It is possible that several more such radical similarities as between these dialects on the one hand and the Shemitic and Sanskrit on the other might be pointed out, but without in any way affecting the point at issue. Indeed, whether these are mere coincidences or the relics of a remotely bygone connection, is not for me to find out; for these are links the unravelling of which must be left to the expert philologist.



## APPENDIX B

### THE PRIMITIVE PHILOSOPHY OF WORDS

LET us take first of all the Ibo word "nna," meaning sire or father. Altering the end vowel to "e" we have mother, "nne"; or by transposing the middle consonant "n," "nwa," or "nwata," a child, also a relation; while by interchanging the final vowel of this latter word with an "e," the imperative "nwe," possess, is formed; and in addition to these, "wanye," woman, "nnedi-uku," an ancestor, and "nnadi-nnadi," ancestry, are also derived. Curiously enough, however, the eldest son and successor is "okpara" or "okpala," and the eldest daughter "ada"—words that have no connection whatever with the original root, although a grandson is "nwa-nwa-woke," a granddaughter, "nwa-nwa-wanye," a grandfather, "nna-òtsie," and grandmother, "nne-otsie," *i.e.* old father and mother. Yet all of which, with the above two exceptions, coming as they have done from the same primitive source, are not only related, but expressive of the one paramount idea or train of thought that issues from the person and embraces possession accordingly.

It will be found distinctly instructive at this juncture to examine this same root, "na," in its form as a preposition, standing, as it does, for about, from, in, on, to, and by means of, as well as for the numeral one, because also traceable, as it is, in the personal pronouns, but more especially in "nde," those, "ngi," thou, "owengi," thyself, "nkena," this, "onweya," himself, itself, "onwe-ayi," ourselves, it is quite possible to see a distinct connection with "nna," father, "nwe," possess, "nwa," a relation or possession, and this again with "ndu,"—"d" being interchangeable with "n"—life, or the animation which endows matter or material embodiment with existence. Because here, too, we can trace a relative connection between the person of the man or father and the property, *i.e.* the people and things associated with him.

Similarly, in the Jekri tongue, while the word "owa" means

a father, "iye"—a distinct expression altogether—is mother, but "oma" is son, "oma-olubirin," daughter, "omere," brother, and "omere-olubirin," sister. In this chain of connections, the fact that "iye," mother, is not derived from the same root is particularly significant, because it plainly suggests the idea that, during the period of which we speak, the mother was not so much the wife, *i.e.* helpmeet or partner in the later or modern sense, but the bearer or producer of children or fruit, hence "iye," as resembling, on a smaller and more personal scale, "eye," the earth, as well as "eye," the life which proceeds from her. This is all the more confirmed by the fact that the mother was the property or slave, *i.e.* servant, of the patriarch—a connection that is to some extent seen in the words "onobirin," woman, and "onokerin," man, and even more so in the Ibo "wan-ohu" and the Niger-Ibo "oru," meaning slave; the latter being undoubtedly akin to "ora," a community or race. While in "ra," which signifies cohabit and prefer, singularly akin to "na" or "nna," father—the "r" in all these last-mentioned words being interchangeable with "n"—it is quite evident that cohabitation was, as it still is, a question of selection or preference on the part of the male sex for certain females who, from the natural point of view, were considered desirable, *i.e.* useful or fruitful as producers of offspring.

For, as I have already shown, there is not the slightest doubt that the inferior position occupied by woman was not entirely because of her being physically weaker and less courageous, but because, in the eyes of these natural people, the male energy was deemed to be—as it appeared to them in the plan of creation and existence—the dominant and fertilising energy, and as such it was esteemed accordingly; while the woman, looked on as she was as only bearer or producer of the virility imparted to her by the fertiliser or generator, naturally subsided into the subjective position she still occupies. Indeed this conception of the matter is, as we have already seen, distinctly traceable in the derivation of the word "iyi" itself. For it is equally a matter of certainty that in the belief of these natives the whole principle of creation appears as one great system of generative and reproductive operations. Thus it is that they have traced back the origin of their own, as of all life, to the earth, or first great producer, whose animated form became long afterwards venerated as the great mother goddess, whose animation they conceived to be due to the co-operating energy of the fertilising sky god. But although there is little or no myth or tradition to assist us in this direction, it is quite possible to trace in the words "elu" or "enu," sky, and "eluwa," earth, an association that supports this principle to a great extent. For in "wa," connected as it is with "nwe," possess, and "nwa,"

father or relation, is implied an association or relationship between the sky and the earth which is borne out in every sense by their religious beliefs and practices ; so that the light in which this sky god, who subsequently became the Supreme Deity and Creator, is regarded resembles nothing so much as that of a being who is the generator, fertiliser, and nourisher or animator of all nature—the exact counterpart, in fact, of the human father or patriarch. What is more, this fact is further strengthened by the very evident connection which exists between the words “nri,” nourishment, and “nna,” father—all the more so when we consider that the letters “r” and “n” are interchangeable, and that this interchanging of letters is, in fact, indiscriminate. Also, that this aspect of the universal fatherhood of God as an ever active fertiliser is entirely consonant with their idea that matter, in the different forms of vegetal, animal, human, and inorganic in which it exists, is an essential embodiment which, when it is animated from or through the primary source, transforms men and animals, *e.g.*, into conscious agents, who in a spiritual or human sense unconsciously, that is, in some vague and indefinable manner, assist the Creator in most, if not in all, of his creative operations—a belief that is to some extent seen in the Tbani name “Tuminbio etemeah,” which means “God, not man, is my Creator.”

Again, in connection with the Ibo word “nne,” mother, it is extremely interesting to observe that the same word, when employed as an adjective, exactly represents “true,” and with “oku,” word, joined to it, “truth.” Distant though the connection between a natural mother and the altruistic ideal of truth may appear to be, it is not in reality so far removed when examined in a natural and simple manner. Because, in doing so, we must remember that the natural definition of truth does not exactly coincide with the civilised concept, expressing, as it does, an idea similar to that which defines “good” as a principle that, while it is a cohering and converging factor when the balance is even, is equally capable of divergence during all periods of unevenness. More than this, however, truth is also a question of personal convenience in every sense and from every personal aspect ; and as in a household all the individual members composing it are merged into the one commanding personality of the ancestral through the medium of its human head, it becomes more than ever a personal matter. So that, whatever the conjugal infidelity and immorality of the married woman may now be, there can be no doubt that in more remote times, although the position of women, owing to the fact of her energy being productive, therefore lesser, was in every sense subordinate and subjective, her standing when she became a mother improved

materially, and as a producer of the male or patriarchal energy she was treated with respect and esteemed accordingly. Not, however, merely as a personal possession capable of fidelity and truth, but as an energy whose personal co-operation was recognised to be an essential factor in the creative and ancestral plan of operations, *i.e.* in the specific direction more especially of continuing and multiplying the seed of the fathers, therefore worthy of patriarchal or personal confidence as a preserving agent, intact in her own person, of the purity of the household and of its spiritual genealogy. For it is in the preservation of this unity of the dual, spiritual, and human household that the basis of honour lies, and not, as from the civilised standpoint, in the action or person of the individual.

It will perhaps better enable the reader to understand the natural idea of dualism which I have here sought to convey by examining the words for "good" and "evil." Thus "mma" or "omma," a word suspiciously akin to "nna," "m" being convertible to "n," stands for the former, and "ndso" for the latter, "adso" or "odso" being used for bad. Taking "mme" first, we find that it is further employed to signify joy—as is also a word called "noma," which is formed from it—and kindheartedness; and, as being meant to express this sympathetic sentiment on the separation or parting of two persons, it has come to imply farewell. Similarly, "omma," as expressing what is beautiful, comely, and elegant, an aspect that from a natural standpoint is something materially and spiritually substantial and useful in the same dual sense, has in its latest evolution developed into good.

But it is in "ndso," evil, although the connection is seemingly more complicated, that the end arrived at is certainly more suggestive. So at first, while comparing it with "adsa," dust, also fish, and "adsa," sacrifice, which appear difficult to connect—beyond the fact that the earth, as the first great mother or producer, was responsible for all productions, a sacrifice being regarded as a necessary and essential return, a tithe or tribute, in fact, to her, and rendered on this account also in order to keep the balance even—it is just possible, however, to find a definite trace of the root "Tsi," God, from whom as Creator all things, even evil, were brought into existence; and this idea is considerably accentuated by the fact that the word "ndsi" signifies black, while "Tsi," as we shall see in the next chapter, also represents darkness. In order, however, to get a clearer insight into the psychology of the dualism that has been alluded to, we must now investigate the associations that are connected with the word "nso." For this expression, meaning growth, which was regarded as a natural



thing that was due to the generative or, as they viewed it, mysteriously animating process, in other words, to the operations of the Creator or generating God, developed into the word "me-nso," literally blood or fruit growth, and as such became a spiritual or sacred act. Thus, when assuming the function of what we now recognise as an adjective, it implied in the same sense holy or sacred when applied to or associated with other features.

So it is evident that "ndu," life, is from the same root as "nse," and that "kwe-ndu"—"kwe" undoubtedly being a derivative of "ke," create—came to mean "that which was growing or possessed by spirit," that is "animate"; and in exactly the same way "na-ndo," as being a favourable or beneficial form of animation, implied eventually amiability. Yet we find that "ndso" and "adso," evil or bad, also "nsi," poison or bane, are all derived unmistakably from the same primitive "nso," growth. But, as has been seen in Part III., there is nothing singular in this when considered and criticised from the standpoint of their own natural beliefs and principles. For, according to these, although evil, when it has arrived at or assumed the unnatural and unholy state of disembodiment, is a purely indivisible unity, incapable of good from its very organisation, good is a dual and composite element that is capable of bifurcation and detachment, *i.e.* of inflicting good or evil in absolute accordance with existing conditions. And, arriving at this conception, as they did, from their observations of nature, it was not in the least surprising that they found the balance evenly adjusted on the whole, alternating, as it did with regard to themselves, between what was beneficial and constructive on the one hand and what was injurious and destructive on the other.

But this personal and possessive factor of proprietorship to which frequent reference has been made, and which is the distinctive as it is the distinguishing feature of the patriarchal system, as this in turn is of natural religion, is all the more plainly seen in the mastership and ownership that is to be found, not only in the powers of life and death which is possessed by all heads of houses and families, but in the very names and idiosyncrasies of their household and tribal deities. As an example of this, the expression *father and mother*, which is still so commonly in use when slaves, dependants, weaker or poorer men, address all patriarchs and persons of wealth, power, influence, or social prominence of any kind, is extremely significant, suggestive as it is in every way of this inclusive yet exclusive, this all-embracing and all-possessive, comprehensive principle, which in the eyes of all natural people is so absolutely essential a feature in the tragically serious problem of life and existence. What is more, we must



also recognise in this concise and epigrammatic phrase a decided acknowledgment of that inevitable co-operation or cohesion between two energies which, in spite of their apparent separateness and disintegration, are attracted or merely gravitate towards one another in consonance with the also inevitable natural law of unity that is essential to the reproduction of the personal unit, *i.e.* of its own species, irrespective of any question of specific energy or sex.

So too, in the person of the god Iyanabo, who presides over the destinies of the Ogbayan, the people bow the knee to and acknowledge the power and authority of "the master" into whose hands is entrusted the fate of every member of the community.

Similarly the Jekri have a family god called Origho, meaning head; and the Brass natives recognise as their master Nyanabo, who discharges the duties of the ancestrally divine office and rules over them with the same arbitrary supremacy as Tamuno, the Creator, and owner of the sky, does over all things living. In the same way, among the Ibo, but under various names, such, for example, as Tsineke, Tsi or Ci, Stuku or Chuku, and Ekeke, we find the same identical master or ownership signified. One extremely significant feature, however, with regard to this Supreme Being—not, perhaps, so much from a philological as from a sociological standpoint—is the fact that there is no word meaning God, or the Creator, which is common to all the tongues and dialects. Or, put in another way, the word in question is entirely different in most if not in all of them. Thus—to cite, *e.g.*, some of the principal of these—in Jekri it is Oritse; in Aboh, Olisso; in Onitsha, Tsi or Tsuku; in Igara, Chama Chala; in Brass, Ayiba; in Ibani, Okrika, and New Calabar, Tamuno; in Ibibio and Efik, Abasi; in Andoni, Owaje or Orè-ene; and in Ibo as we have seen in the preceding paragraph.

But while, philologically, this is comparatively of little account, demonstrating as it does most pointedly and vividly the exceedingly potential factor of clanship, and, more even than this, the shrinking and instinctive sense of social isolation—unmistakable relic as this is of inherent animalism; from a sociological standpoint it is a distinct and important link in this chain of ancestral associations. For, if it does nothing else, it at least demonstrates the fact that even the Supreme Deity or Creator was of course originally, as he now is, the family god—the personal being, the father of their fathers, who for all time has watched over and ruled their destinies, and from whom, as the first and original ancestor or fertiliser, they claim their origin.

More significant, however, in a measure even than this is the fact that in every community or household throughout the

entire country the household or protecting deities, called Wanyana-oru by the Ibani and Ibu-dogu or Aggu by the Ibo, *i.e.* "our owner," represent not only the same identical feature or principle, but form an association or link in the ancestral genealogy which is pre-eminently important. For they are a distinct connection between the household in the flesh and the household in the spirit, and through the latter with the supreme god, which enables the ethnologist to all the more easily trace the pedigree that had been established by the primitive ancestors of these people, which, tracing it backward and upward from themselves, as they clearly did, through their household and communistic masters or owners, had finally terminated in the Creator as the first Father and Generator of the human race in particular, but of the world in general. Indeed, the deeper we go into this question of associations and connections by means of these excessively personal deities and the customs and ceremonials that have grown up around, not simply the mere memories, but, as these natural people devoutly believed, the actual spirit forms of their fathers which were preserved in various material embodiments or emblems, the more palpable does it become how simply and naturally the idea of God evolved out of certain inherent instincts which inspired fear and reverence towards and because of the substantial existence and authority of the father in the flesh, and then of the phantasmal concept of the Father in the spirit—in a word, the development of the spiritual from the human. For to natural man the material embodiment presented no less important a feature than the spiritual, in spite of the fact that the physical in him had succumbed to the supremacy of the unseen and merely phantasmal which had been unconsciously called into being through an excess of emotion on the part of the mental energy of his own material organism.

In nothing is the dearth of ideas evinced so plainly as in the fact that the one word stands for and interprets a number of different ideas or serves for a variety of varying or variant purposes, also in the formation from the same root of words which were totally dissimilar in meaning to the original primitive. More than this, however, it is a matter of the most essential importance that the reader should from the very outset recognise the very palpable anthropomorphism of natural man's religious development, besides its absolutely emblematical character. For, as he saw in every natural phenomenon, element, or object an emblem that to him was symbolical of personal associations, so every word that he formed grew also into a symbol that, while it stood for these natural emblems, connected them too with his inmost thoughts. But not only this. For, as has been seen in

Part III., this emblemism represented a principle that in its importance, according to his crude yet literal valuation of matters, although secondary and supplementary, was as essential to the preservation and maintenance of the spirit essence as this was vital to the material embodiment.

We have already seen how close as well as obvious is the connection between the two Jekri words "eye," meaning earth, also life, and "iye," mother. Now if we take their word "emo," breath, we cannot help being struck with its kinship to "oma," a son; and if we delve into the psychology of those natural, therefore deeply simple, motives that were at work during the period of word formation, the connection will become quite obvious. For we must recollect that in the minds of these people breath was equivalent to, if not synonymous with, soul or spirit, as this again was considered to be the "life" itself—the principle, or rather essence, as they looked at it, that not only animated the body, but which gave it all its vitality, mobility, and intelligence. So the son, as successor to his father in the flesh, bearing as he also did in his own person the paternal virility as well as the spiritual vitality, was esteemed as a breath or spirit of the holy ancestral lineage, in virtue of which he assumed the office of family priest, which rendered his person sacred.

It is necessary to carry the analysis of this spirit idea still farther, for it will enable the reader to get a clearer insight into, and a more thorough grasp of, the spiritual aspect of the naturism which is described in Part III. Curiously enough, too, although I lay no special stress on the point, this Jekri word "emo," breath, is strangely akin to the Ibo word "ume," breath, which also, however, means capacity, and as "umi," depth, while the core or heart of a thing or matter is interpreted by "ime." But the root from which this word breath evolved has had several radiations, some of which, although now they bear on the face of them interpretations that seem quite removed from the original, are in reality manifestly connected. Thus, *e.g.*, "mea," bear fruit, "me" or "meh," blood, and "ba-meh," bleed, had undoubtedly to do with "ume," breath, because to this day we find among these natives the same vague idea and mystery associated with blood as with breath. Not that they consider blood as in any way the same as spirit, or confound one with the other; at the same time it is an equivalent, for, like the Jews and all natural people of old, the blood to them is the life, the fruit, or nourishment of the body, the spilling of which not only causes dissolution to the flesh but deprives it of the immortal spirit. So, as we shall see later on, while the unlawful shedding of blood is a defilement to the sacred earth, when spilt in a lawful or righteous

cause it is a sacrament and a purification. The former of these principles is most distinctly and vividly seen in the Ibo word "nmerus," which means corruption or defilement, the literal interpretation being blood putrefaction, from "me," blood, and "ru" or "rua," rot or putrefy; and the latter, to some extent, is traceable in the word "me-ebube," admire, which is composed of the two words "me," blood, and "abuba," fat, meaning literally a something that, as it was first of all substantial or fruitful, *i.e.* as regards its utility, became in this practical and personal way pleasing to the senses, therefore an object or substance to admire or appreciate. But we have not yet done with the word "ume." Passing over the fact that "umu-nna" is a blood-relation, we find that "me" or "mere" also came in time, as embodying the growth or development of a thing, *i.e.* either some thought in the abstract or a material body, to mean become, act, and do, and in this way it is quite possible to trace the development of the imperative "muo" or "muro," meaning beget, bring forth. But "mo" or "moa" in Ibo is spirit, and the fact that in defining the latter these natives see in breath, as also in wind, not only a mere likeness but an affinity, became all the more significant in this close and radical resemblance of the two words. While, however, it is interesting to note that out of "muo," beget, has evolved the word "emu," shine, and "moa," shining, as being the product or association of some luminous quality belonging to or connected with the spirit, it is still more interesting to follow up the connection which exists between breath and wind, and between this again and the sky. Thus while "ume" by itself implies breath, it has the same meaning with "iku" prefixed to it.

Dropping "ume," and with its two last letters reiterated, "ikuke" or "ifufe" becomes breeze, wind, air, and also sky. Taking the root "ke" by itself, or "kere," we get the word make or create, and from this, as we have previously seen, "okeke," Creator, "nke-akereke," a created being, and "nke-ahu," corporeal. So that here we have a distinct connection which shows that the Creator and the sky god were at some very remote period not so much confounded as looked upon to be one and the same being. And in this very palpable connection it is also quite transparent that in the wind, which to them appeared as it were to rush downward from the elevation of the sky, and, so to speak, out of its very bowels, accounting, according to primitive mode of thought, for the invincibility of its might and destructiveness, they not only saw but felt that vital and animating essence which they also associated with the breath and the soul that was in their own bodies. Indeed, it is further evident that this mobile energy, along with light, darkness, and other phenomena and elements, were in



the most primitive instance of all, as we are soon about to see, primarily and essentially attributes of the great Sky God that subsequently were dissociated or detached, becoming, as they now are, the independent operations of other lesser or departmental deities.

But to grasp thoroughly the peculiar significance and suggestiveness of this unique connection, we must once more go to the Jekri tongue. Here we find that "okuku," which is evidently derived from the same root, "uku," as the Ibo word "ikuku," means darkness, an element which among these natives is often associated with wind, which is so prominent a feature of the prevailing tornado, while "uku" means death, the effect in both cases having undoubtedly been looked upon as due to the same fundamental cause. Because, simple and ignorant as these natural people undoubtedly were on all points, but more especially with regard to the law of causation, and from the particularly enlightened standpoint of modern and scientific civilisation, in a comparative and primitive sense they were by no means so fundamentally ignorant as we suppose. Certainly at this period of word formation, when the religion in them was gradually developing into the ceremonial of public adoration towards their spirit fathers and the great sky father and earth mother, although they had no explanation for their beliefs, they all the same believed in the existence of cause and effect, and of actions and reactions. For, as has been seen in Part III., it was on this principle of recurrence, itself a natural instinct, of endeavouring to preserve the equilibrium of right and wrong, or good and evil, *i.e.* of personal existence, and of reaping the rewards or punishments of personal acts, that the whole social, legal, and religious structure of primitive society was based and constructed. To resume, however. Now although the Ibo for death, "onwu," and darkness, "itsitsi," is quite different to the corresponding Jekri words that have been mentioned, we find the same root "uku" in the Ibo words "tsuku" or "chuku," meaning God; "ikuku," wind; and "okukwe," belief or faith. For although this latter term is clearly made up of "oku," word, and "kwe," believe, it is quite easy to trace in this expression "oku," word, an unmistakable derivation from "uku" of "tsuku," God the Creator and Giver of speech, "kwe" being possibly derivable from "ke," create. Because a connection such as this demonstrates most forcibly that in the literal minds of these natural folk death is not only associated with darkness, and speech with God, but that God, as the maker or generator of persons and embodiments, as well as of spirits and speakers, is associated with all three. It is quite evident, therefore, that as the result of these personal connections, belief or faith also became in the abstract an associa-



tion that almost visibly demonstrated, simply because it constituted, as they thought, the existence of such tangible realities as God, speech, death, and darkness.

This is all the more plainly seen in the Niger-Ibo words "tsi" or "ci," and "otsitsi" or "oci," meaning respectively creator and darkness, the latter, it is evident, as a most decided emanation or creation of the former. But in tracing these connections it is primarily and most distinctly essential for the reader to grasp once and for all the natural concept of the Creator and his process of creation, as I have endeavoured to the best of my ability to describe it in the previous portion of this chapter, because in this natural concept of the matter lies embedded the key to the spiritual riddle that has been presented to him in Part III., and a clear comprehension of it will at least enable him to elucidate much that would otherwise appear enigmatical.

Then, again, it is very evident that there was a distinct and tangible association between darkness and daylight, which was interpreted as an all-night contest between the two contending factors, in which the latter emerges triumphant and radiant, so to speak, out of it; thus "tsi" is daylight, "gutsie" is dawn, "otsitsi" or "itsitsi," night, "otsitsi" or "utsitsi," to-morrow, and "etsi," darkness; but "tsi," as we have seen, is also God, so that it is quite palpable that as detachments of His, in other words, personal effects of the same great cause, day and night, or light and darkness, were expressed by words which gravitated round the central symbol or root "tsi." Indeed, it requires but little stretch of imagination to picture first of all in these phenomena, as they were pictured by natural man, a sky god who embraced them all in his expansive person, but which came afterwards to imply certain operations that were essentially God-like or like God.

These conclusions are, without a doubt, further strengthened by the fact that deride is signified by "tsi" or "otsi," the question of derision having presumably been connected with that of alternating supremacy because, like all natural people, these natives are in every sense, instinctively in fact, dual, so that they deride as easily as they exult, and take life with the same unconcern—although they are all the time conscious of its gravity—as they bring life into the world. Continuing, however, we find that the words for separate and wait are "itse" and "tse," and that cut is "batsa," while dislocate is "tsi fieupu," both these latter words suggesting, if not denoting, the idea that the process of light emerging from darkness resembled nothing so much as an act of cutting or dislocation.

It is not possible, however, to leave this important primitive

"tsi," with its various significant associations and connections, without taking into consideration the fact that there yet remain a few words that are manifestly derived from or affiliated with the same root. First of these is "otsie," meaning aged, which, preceded by "ndi," implies ancient people, literally old or god-life, *i.e.* life which has come from God, and as the natural sequence of which the phrase "ya otsie" has come to be interpreted as respect, for the reverence paid to old age is a purely ancestral matter, and one that savours more of custom than of humanity. Pursuing this train of thought, we also find that animate and animation are interpreted by "kwe-ndu" and "ikuta-ndu," words that are both associated with "ke," "nna," and "uku." Therefore as "kwe" means obey as well as believe, obedience, or adherence to life, *i.e.* to the creative principle, is evidently here implied.

But we have seen in the beginning of this chapter that the word "otsie" has been employed in the formation of those words that express the existence of former parents, making the chain of connections between the human being and the Supreme more marked than ever. Curiously enough, too, ambiguous though it may appear, it is decidedly feasible to see in the development of the word murder, "bu-otsu," a disconnection or dislocation of the ancestral or spiritual line, that at once placed the act of killing a member of the household on an equality with blood or land pollution. For, taking the term to pieces, "bu" means cut off, and "otsu," whether derived from "otso," sacred, or "otsie," old, is undoubtedly connected, along with them, to the primary root.

Finally, it is even possible to trace from the latter, as being symbolic of the creative, animating, and speech-giving principle, the word "etse" or "utse," which implies conception, for the idea involved, according to the native way of thinking, is identical.

Returning once more to the expression "okeke," we find that although it is interpreted as Creator, with the personal pronoun "onye" prefixed to it, it implies a dealer, the root verb "ke," which means create, also meaning to deal. So, judging at least from a comprehensive and analytical study of their methods of thought, as illustrated by hard and fast practice, the Creator, in the opinion of these literal people, is most decidedly a dealer, in every natural sense, but on a large scale, of course, dealing, as they think he does, with all the various phases and elements of Nature. For with them the Almighty and self-contained patriarch or ancestor is one who has dealings with his people, *i.e.* those who are dependants or detachments from his own person; in other words, he is the doler out of everything good or bad, of justice or natural equity, in the form of rewards and punishments, as the

case may be—in one word, the master and owner, who keeps the balance even. Similarly, but in a more superlative sense, the Creator is but the Patriarch of the patriarchs, the Father of fathers, or the Master Dealer.

This interpretation, too, is all the more evident in the direction of the word dispenser, the symbol for which, "okeke," is also identical with creator, and even more so when we ascertain that "onye-okeke" is one who distributes, or a distributor; also that "okeke" (unaccented) means division, and "ke" divide; an interpretation which is much more appreciated when contrasted with the association that existed, as we have seen, between daylight and darkness, which subsequently was nothing more than an alternation of supremacy between the night and day gods, that ended with dislocation or division.

It is also only reasonable to infer that "ka," to excel, must have been, in a comparative sense, associated with the work of the Creator, as one who had surpassed in everything, but especially in the direction of the singularly unique element of speech; and this is to some extent borne out by the fact that "ka" or "ku" is talk or tell, and "oku" call, so that as something called, spoken, or told by God, "oku" came in time to mean a word; and doubtless, too, as being a divine element, it was also applied to fire.

I have already called attention to the fact regarding the great importance of the part which imitation has occupied, and still occupies, in the evolution of language, but so far I have only made but casual reference to the later but equally important feature of symbolism, that also has occupied a prominent place in the construction of every tongue. This has been particularly noticeable with reference to the words into the psychology of which we have been endeavouring to arrive. And if this analysis has failed to throw upon the subject the luminosity that had been intended, it has at least made it transparent that the natural elements of the earth and the surrounding phenomena answered, and so fulfilled, a most essential purpose in the natural law of evolution by appearing to these primitive philosophers as living symbols or rather emblems, which they believed to be operated on by the departed spirits of their own immediate family circles; therefore in every sense personal, and associated in their minds primarily with certain ideas, and eventually by words, that were either descriptive, suggestive, or typical of the emblems in question. But as this is a matter which is common to every race and language we will not further expatiate on it, beyond remarking that this custom of utilising, or at all events of taking advantage of natural features, more especially with regard to those appertaining to the earth, is to be seen all over Southern Nigeria in the

names given to localities, towns, rivers, etc., such, *e.g.* as Oboihia, the name of an Ibo town, from "ohia," bush, or "ahia," market, and "obo," a person's name; Nkarahia, also an Ibo town, and with a similar derivation; Nkwala, the name of an Ibo district; Finima, bird town, from "fini," bird, and "ama," town or country; Okuloma, curlew place, from "okulo," curlew, and "ama"; Isuama, the name of an Ibo clan, from "isu," surface of anything, or face, and "ama"; Ago-ama, the name of a small Ibo district, from "ago" or "agu," leopard, and "ama"; Azumini, the name of an Ibo town, from "azu," on or near, "mini," water; Ekwe, the name of an Ibo community, from "igwe," sky.

What, however, is a more noticeable fact, and a much more modern innovation than this with regard to the naming of localities and communities, is the even more familiar method of distinguishing them by means of patronymics; thus, "Omo-soko," from "omo," children of Soko; "Omo-oyere," the children of Oyere; Ekperewari, from "wari," the town of Ekpere; "Omo-pra Ebelu," the children of Pra and of Ebelu.

It is essential, however, for the better comprehension of their religion, and with the idea of still further elucidating this symbolism, to show how clearly the evolution of this very natural process is to be still more vividly seen, in the way that words have evolved from certain natural symbols, out of which, again, other features, as being similar to, or characteristic of, the original, have also developed into expressions; and with this object the following examples have been carefully selected. Thus we find in Jekri that while "ero" is a river, "ere" is a python, not merely because the natives have recognised a resemblance between the windings of the one and the sinuosities of the other, but because the latter is generally found in the vicinity of water, and is regarded as an amphibious reptile. In like manner fog, arising as it does from the river, is called "eri," but how "eru" became a slave, unless as a subservient to either, or both the python or river gods, it is difficult, of course, to determine.

Taking "eji," rain, next, it is an easy matter to connect it with "oji," a tornado, showing that in the natural thoughts of these primitive philosophers the latter is associated with the former, as one of the results of the operations of the tornado god. Evidently, too, the resemblance between the glistening of a torrential rain-drop and the liquid humidity of the eye led to the formation of the word "eju" for eye, in other words, to the substitution of the word expressive of the symbol to denote the visual organ. And so possibly it may have been that "eja," fish, was first of all connected with water, and in this way with rain. Following up the train of words which appear to have radiated from this root, we



arrive at "uje," food, "ojo," day, and "aja," meaning town or country, all of them seemingly as divergent from each other as it is possible for words to be, beyond suggesting a certain association between them on the ground that the securing of a supply of food, as the business of the day, was the work of the community, which was carried out on strictly co-operative lines; an equal division being made at the end of the day, among the various social units, of the food thus obtained, a custom that, according to their traditions, was undoubtedly prevalent at a not very remote period.

Reverting once more, therefore, to the root "uku," which we saw was so closely related to "tsuku" as well as to "tsi," it is practically impossible to see what possible connection could ever have existed between it and the Ibo words "okúkú," fowl, and "okuko," a cupping-horn; or how "imo," a nose, was ever associated with "emo," breath, although the latter may be explained by the fact that the organ in question, as being the channel by which the breath went in and came out of the body, was regarded and named accordingly. So, too, "ewo," which is a goat in Igara, in Jekri stands for doctor or sorcerer, as well as hand. A curious association, to say the least of it, if association it can be called, that must have originally connected the man of primitive science as a most useful if not indispensable member of society,—one of its principal hands, so to speak.

Returning, however, to the word "oji," it is easy to understand how "ojiji" became a shadow, and how the same word, also "oji" in Niger-Ibo, is interpreted as black, for in these tropical latitudes the gloom and intensity of cloudiness, which is the prevailing atmospheric condition, may develop almost into the darkness of night with extreme rapidity; but while it is possible to trace a distinct connection between the Jekri "oritse," God, and the Niger-Ibo "tsi," there appears to be no link whatever between "ojiji" and "oritse." Yet in the expression "agura," stars, and "urare," sky, we can again perceive how closely these two phenomena were associated, and how symbolical they were in the minds of these primitive people of the mysterious and awesome Being who had created them; and it is obvious, too, that "akparara," thunder, as his awful or awe-filling voice, was also in the same definite manner regarded as an element that was connected with the operations of the Sky God.

Selecting as our next illustration a forest or bush—a natural feature so characteristic of the Southern Nigerian environment—the Ibo word is "ohia" or "ofia," while that for market is "ahia" or "afia," a practical proof that markets were originally, as they still are, held in woods. So a market, as a place where bartering is carried on, accounted for the word "afia," merchandise, as being



the material that was exchanged at the market. Similarly, that portion of a bush which was allotted for burial—in other words, reserved for spirits as such—was called “otso-ofia,” and became at once “tabu,” *i.e.* under ancestral or spiritual protection, therefore exclusive, prohibitive, and sacred. Descending from a feature so prominent as this to the contemplation of an object as insignificant as a calabash, “uba,” we see how easily it became converted to “ubo,” a vessel, utilised as a rule for drinking purposes. In much the same way it is extremely difficult for the reader to see what possible connection there can ever have been between “utsegin,” an axe, “eso-egin,” fruit, or “isangin,” blood; but if he has followed the obvious relationship which has been shown earlier in the chapter between the Ibo words “me,” blood, “mo,” spirit, and “ume,” breath, it will enable him to appreciate and so bridge over the yawning gulf which seemingly separates these three Jekri words. But to simplify a paradox such as this involves the explanation of a doctrinal principle, the gist of which can only here be stated, and for the fuller explanation of which the reader is referred to Part III.

In a few words, then, the principle in question embodies a belief in animism, or the spiritual animation of all matter, organic and even inorganic. So that, according to these natural philosophers, stone or earth, especially if selected as embodiments, were as certain to be animated with the creative essence as human or animal organisms, and in this way artificial objects were quite as liable to be spiritually endowed as the natural symbols. But, as we shall see eventually, this animism was one purely of degree, and not necessarily an independent or specific animation by the spirits of human beings or animals—a later doctrinal development that naturally evolved out of the earlier and more primitive conception. Taken in this literal sense, then, it is quite a simple matter to trace the connection which must have once existed, so as to lead to the more recent formation of the word “utsegin” from the more ancient terms “isangin” and “eso-egin,” though why the principle involved should be any more applied to an axe than to other similar weapons or utensils is not for me to say; and following up the connection, it is further and much more possible to trace “esan,” bone, and “esen,” foot, to the same root. This derivation is all the more obvious in the connection that exists between the Ibo words “nkpulu,” fruit, and “nkpulobi,” soul, being, as the latter is, a combination of “nkpulu” and “obi,” an abode, which is the noun formed from the primitive “bi” or “be,” meaning dwell, or a dwelling-place, the body being regarded as the substance or abode, and the soul as the fruit or spirit dwelling therein. Closely affiliated with this root is “bu,” meaning

be, exist, and "buru," bear. But "bu" or "bi" also implies cut off, and "bue" or "buo" kill. Thus it is evident that from "bu," the state of being or existence, to "bue," the act that produces death or dissolution, there was in the estimation of the natural philosophers but very little difference; merely, as we have seen before, an exchange from one state of life to another state—the transfer of the fruit or soul either from the material to the spiritual world, or from one form of embodiment to some other. So it is that among these natives and all natural people, human, and in fact all, life is held cheap, also that the sacrifice of the fruits and flesh of the earth was considered essential for the subsistence of the spiritual ancestors and gods. Further than this, it is again a simple matter to see in this question of sacrifice the dual interpretation of substance and spirit in the partaking of the flesh of the offerings by the human members, and of the spirit thereof by the ancestral shade. So that from this standpoint it is all the more easy to understand how, as we saw in the analysis of the word "bu-otsù," murder, the act as committed against the body and the spirit, becomes a dual offence, which assumes in its latter phase a threatening, some disconnection of the ancestral continuity, —a serious impiety, therefore murder. Indeed, an examination of the word "bu-ànu," butcher, confirms this in every point, the literal meaning being "bu," cut off or dissect, "ànu," the flesh (of animals), or without bone, which is in direct contradistinction to "bu-otsù." There are many further associations connected with this root, but space prevents me from referring to more than the most important. This in the shape of "ba" means eat, eating being, no doubt, considered as equivalent to existing; but how this again came as "bo" to mean ancient, unless it was that existence, as a spiritual matter traceable up to the Sky Father, was looked on as beyond computation. Similarly, it is not easy to comprehend the reason why "bo" or "bota" now means restrain and rebuke, or why "bo-ogu" is medicine, also quell. It is obvious, however, that "oku," word, and not "ogu," medicine, is here implied, so that it is quite possible to arrive at the conclusion that mediation has always been regarded, as it still is, as an ancient form of exercising restraint or rebuke between contending parties.

Following up this principle of material animism, there is no difficulty in recognising the same idea at work in the construction of the word "amara," meaning both a paddle and action. For it is easy to see in this an animistic association which not only imbues the former with a spirit of its own, but that gives it the action requisite to make it of use. So, too, a favour or a free gift, which in the eyes of these natives must be solid or substantial acts, is "amara," and in this way, with an accent over the initial

vowel, the same word also implies behaviour, and so benefaction, a benefactor being "onye-more amara," *i.e.* one who performs actions. Similarly, to be gracious, "di-amara," the prefix "di" implying he or exist, *i.e.* the being in a state of action that confers a benefit, or what is beneficial; and this interpretation is further accentuated by the knowledge that "di," when combined with "ike," strength, means solid. So if we examine the matter carefully we discover that aliment, as being due to the action of food, arrives in the word "nri" at the same substantial or satisfactory result. Therefore, as the hand which conveys the food to the mouth, and so supplies nourishment to the body, "akka-nri," again, implies the right or proper hand for the act in question. Yet what we, with a certain amount of implied contempt, call a crumb, is by these natives designated "nri," apparently on the principle that a part is equivalent to the whole. The extreme significance, however, of the attachment or convergence of these expressions towards this root lies, it is more than possible, in the fact that it is to the family of "Nri" that many or most of the other Ibo clans trace their descent and origin, as to the parent stem of their race—a fact which is indubitably supported by the present meaning of the word. In the tracing of all such primitive words as those, the original interpretation of which we have been investigating, it is essential for the reader to remember that, from the literal outlook of the natural philosopher, whatever his thoughts on the subject were, his language—*i.e.* the vocabulary of words at his command—besides its crudity and limitations, was far too absolutely symbolic or literal to be in any sense expressive enough to express his ideas. Consequently, although he did not in any way confound human or animal blood with the juices and fruits of vegetal growths, or these again with breath or spirit, he all the same associated them with the life-giving or animating principle that to him represented the motive consciousness of all existing matter, which in the various forms of natural phenomena and elements appeared as actually living and personal emblems. Enough, however, has been said in relation to this aspect of the question to enable the reader to appreciate the symbolic or concrete nature of primitive man's natural efforts towards the development of a language, so that it is quite time now for us to trace how the merely impersonal and abstract ideas evolved from the more personal and concrete symbols; for apart from other philosophical considerations, this further investigation, involving as it does the delineation of a greater and far more expansive mental development, is trebly instructive, demonstrating on the one hand the expression of his ordinary thoughts, and on the other the deepest convictions of all that was most personal to him, *i.e.* his religion

and morality, while it further enables us, finally, to get a still profounder insight into a philosophy that, in spite of this development, was, as it still is, primarily and essentially natural in its naked and primitive simplicity. But in attempting to arrive at these conclusions, which we are now about to essay, and in order to avoid unnecessary confusion and misconception, the reader must do so with the natural definition of simplicity before his eyes, for even in the simple construction of primitive symbols and words there is an implied subtlety and depth of thought that we, with ideas so different, and from an altitude so abnormally elevated, are apt to overlook; whereas it is in this very duplicity of the simple, or simplicity of the duplex, that the essence of their entire philosophy is to be discovered.

Dealing, as we are now about to do, with words that, although they were primarily, no doubt, derived from symbols or tangible objects, later on developed into abstractions more or less impersonal, we will commence this effort by seizing the shadow instead of the substance, but on this occasion only. Yet paradoxical though it may appear, a course such as this will enable us to appreciate the fact that the Ibo word "inyinyo" or "enyinyo," by first of all being employed to symbolise a shadow, then came to be used as a likeness or picture of any thing or object. If, however, we pursue our investigations, we find that this word for shadow has itself been derived from "ihinye," a thing, *i.e.* a substance or embodiment, to which is attached, or that is endowed with, a shadow or soul, one being as indispensable to the other as the other is to it. To better understand this idea, it is obvious that this word "ihinye" is made up of "anya," a something material but indefinite, and "ife," "h" and "f" being transferable, meaning be, exist, and so in its further development expressing property, *i.e.* a personal possession. "Anyá," however, also means an eye, an interpretation out of which it is quite feasible to see light in another direction. For as it is by means of the eye alone that either a shadow or a picture can be observed, it is more than probable that this organ, which to natural man was itself a source of much mysticism and speculation, out of which, as he thought, the soul and the obsessing spirit could look and observe, not merely in an ordinary sense, but with an intent and an effect which was evil, and that made of it an emblem of destruction and of fear, imparting import in consequence; so that it became, in time, connected in his mind with the shadow or soul that to him was an actual and tangible although invisible presence.

In a very similar way it is also instructive to see how distress, affliction, or trouble, represented as they are by the one word "ahuhu" or "afufu," and suffering, "ta ahúhú" or "ta-afufu,"



have evolved out of "ofufu," which means destruction. For it is obvious that as distress and suffering spring naturally enough from the effects of destruction, wind, "ufufe," as being one of the principal destructive agents of their environment, appeared unmistakably to these people as the most prominent natural cause or factor of affliction and woe. Yet "iwe," which implies sorrow, to be a something vexatious and wrathful, has no connection seemingly with this potential agent, although it is a mental condition which might very reasonably be expected as a result of destruction. On the contrary, however, regarded, as it undoubtedly was, as a personal matter, it is certainly connected with the root "nwe," possess or have; because light-hearted and thoughtless as these people are, they are all the same weighed down by a sense of an impending and inevitable doom, the dreadful uncertainty and unexpectedness of which is sufficient in itself, apart from the miserable and savage conditions under which they live, to fill their very souls with vexatious if not wrathful sorrow.

To change the subject to something more cheerful, the words "dokwa" and "dozi," when translated literally, mean adjust; so, in the usual way, "ndokwa" and "ndozi" become an adjustment, and as arguing that such a conclusion imports or necessitates contending issues or factions, an arrangement, and then an amendment or even amelioration, and finally an agreement or settlement of the question in dispute; this latter word, however, if further represented by "ka-aba" and "ndaba," which bears a striking resemblance to the Zulu term "indaba," a meeting or palaver for the purpose of coming to an adjustment. In Ibo, "ndaba" also implies correspondence or fitness, while "ndokwa" and "ndozi" mean improvement; and as in this development a certain fitness of things, which is eminently suitable, is understood, "di-ndokwa" occupies the position with advantage. A train of thought such as this is in every sense consistent with the intensely practical side of Delta human nature, which sees in utility a beauty of solidity that appeals to their love of the substantial. But we are not yet finished with the two latter words, for, meaning, as they also do, decoration, it is again possible to trace in this departure a trifling illustration of that inherent dualism which opposes to the practical that also innate love of finery and ornament which is the birthright of every human unit, civilised or savage.

If, however, the reader has not already got an insight into the subtlety of these people by means of the various words that have been discussed, he will perhaps be better able to do so in the following examples. In the root "go," for instance, we get first of all the meaning deny, then, as a sequence of denial, which is



"agugo," exculpate, and finally, as the result of exculpation, by reiteration and the prefix of an "n," we arrive at "ngogo," exultation, it being quite evident that exculpation, as a consequence of denial, becomes of course a matter for exultation. And to those who understand the psychology of these simple or, as we would call them, artful people, the train of thought here unfolded is normal in the extreme; for the natural art of their natural temperament is to conceal an act, therefore it is in no sense immoral or a lie to deny it. For such a course is entirely a question of the skill of one man pitted against the skill of another. It is in fact to his adversary that the discovery of the act is left, as a matter of course, because an acknowledgment of it is an acknowledgment of guilt, which in every sense and from every standpoint is deemed not merely an act of downright folly, but of absolute unskilfulness—because, in a word, an offence is no offence until it has been exposed and proved. In obvious support, as it were, of this, we find that "nzúzo," a secret, as being a something that it was essential should be hidden, was evidently taken from the word "nzuzo," meaning a shelter. The natural principle, in fact, on which these natives regulate their moral conduct is precisely similar to that enunciated by Socrates in the Dialogues of Plato, that the mendacious man is capable, intelligent, and wise; so that if he cannot tell a lie on occasions, he only exposes or demonstrates his own ignorance. For just as natural justice is the will of the stronger, a lie is but the natural word or act of human subtlety. It is possible, in fact, to detect in this principle the Eleatic definition of a lie, based as it was on the belief that as being alone had existence, no reality could be attached to non-being, and that therefore falsehood, which was merely the expression of non-being, was impossible. For although the Delta natives are deficient, if not altogether devoid, of sophistry, such as the ancient Greeks indulged in, to them matter of any kind, as we shall see later on, is animated or endowed with spirit. But going deeper into the antecedents of this primitive "gho," it is quite possible to connect it with the same word that represents happen or occur. With an accent on the final "ò," also by reiteration and a prefix, swelling into "gho-aghugho," it implies to impose on, and, with only a slight change of pronunciation, produced by the inflection of an accent on the initial vowel of "aghugho," it further develops into a word that means conspire and intrigue. Dropping the "gho," "aghugho" by itself, as we saw in Part II., stands for trick, cheat, fraud, and subtle, and with "di" prefixed to it, cunning or skilful.

Extremely interesting, however, as this connection is, it is even

still more so to discover that this same root "gho," only with a slightly different pronunciation, means crop, a crop being "agho," the noun being formed in the ordinary way; while by prefixing "no" to it, and altering the final "o" to "a," "noagha" implies decay; and in much the same way we arrive at "bogha" or "gho-agma," exchange, and "aghó-izizu," first-fruits. But while it is decidedly a matter of difficulty to connect "gho," happen or occur, with "gho," crop, beyond the fact that the latter, as a regular and natural event, led up to the adoption or utilisation of the concrete reality to signify any ordinary occurrence, the association between growth and decay appeared to these natural philosophers to be so close as to demonstrate a tangible and inevitable connection that was but another phase of the same mystic process of the great generating father and mother deities, and in this light it is also a simple matter to trace the development of the word exchange; for even here it is quite possible to see the same procreative principle at work in the minds of these observant and scientific philosophers—scientific because they were imbued with the spirit or rather the instinct of curiosity, which is the basis of all science, the connection between dissolution and reproduction being looked on by them as simply a process of substitution, a changing of one form into another. So, too, in the word "wuo," which means die, and which with the affix "bin" becomes decay, we have a further demonstration that death and dissolution were also regarded either as a similar operation or part of the same process.

These various radiations from the main root "gho," when examined through a thorough knowledge of native character and idiosyncrasy, make it very clear, as pointed out in Part II., how radically duplex, *i.e.* how absolutely natural, in fact, this is. And the deeper we make the investigation, the more obvious does the fact become, that not only in their social life, but in their personal characteristics and temperament, these instincts, from which the stratagems and arts of cunning, fraud, subtlety, and skill have emanated, are most distinctly to be traced to the same natural instincts that are to this day to be seen in the various animals of their environment.

To know and understand the human beings, it is indispensable that we should know and understand the animal beings—not, however, as we ordinarily see them, captive in menageries, but as they exist, free and unconfined, in their own haunts of swamp and forest. Then, and only then, is it possible to realise how the methodical tortoise is symbolical to them of much sophistry and many virtues, and how the sinuous python represents to them a type and emblem of cunning and subtlety that is less skilful but

more potential in its scope, typical as it is of a power which is all-enfolding and constricting, than that of the inoffensive shell-back.

Passing on to another aspect of their moodish and variable philosophy, the dualism of these natural people is once again evident in the fact that they either saw little or no difference between the passions of love and hate, or at least recognised the existence of a kinship or oneness that bifurcated in opposite directions, owing to the variation of the exciting causes. Thus the Ibani word for love is "belema," and for hate is "belemaa," merely a lengthening out or prolongation of the last vowel, simply to show that the adjustment of the balance had been so disturbed or distended as to divert the channel of the natural emotion from the level of love into the opposing or conflicting level of hate; so, too, while the Ibo call enmity or malice "ero" or "iro," and "nro" pain, they speak of "uro" as a thing which is nice and pleasant.

Compatible with the central idea around which this book has been written, it has all along been my earnest endeavour to place at the reader's disposal the most natural, at the same time comprehensive, words; but instructive as they all have been, it is not possible, from a philological standpoint at least, to produce a better example than that of the noun "ike," meaning "strength." Examining it carefully, we find that "dike," stretch or divide, is derived from "ike," strength, implying the existence of an energy that possesses the force or strength to stretch or divide anything to an appreciable extent. This is all the more evident in the adjective strong, which also is interpreted by "dike," and even by "ike" itself. But "ike," meaning, too, as it does, power, readily transformed the more concrete matter into the abstract idea of authority; authorise being interpreted by "nye-ike," the literal meaning of which is "nye," add or bestow, and "ike," strength, *i.e.* an addition or bestowal of power. Similarly "inye" or "nye-akka" is an auxiliary or a help, *i.e.* "akka," a hand, added or bestowed, or "onye-akka," a helper, or one who helps with the hand; and associating, as they must have done, the idea of austerity with authority, it is not surprising to find that a person who is austere is "akka-ike," or literally one whose hand has strength, and therefore authority. Following up the same idea, or rather the contraction of it, in another direction, we find that "idi-ike," closeness or compactness, and "di-ike," close or compact, as a something that is beyond the power of extension, is also a force that implies the existence of strength which is compressive in its operations, and in this way it represents as well our word solid or substantial. It is evident, too, that the

same principle is involved in such words as "di-dike," courageous; "idi-ike," firmness; and "na-ike," vehement; and "da-ike," cogent, *i.e.* with regard to argument, for a similar compactness or concentration of power is implied in all of them, including "nye-ike," another meaning of which is, invest with power.

But we are not yet quite done with the word "ike," for by prefixing "gu" to it we arrive at the very opposite end of strength, namely, weaken, "gu" meaning it ends, weakness being interpreted by "ike-ogugo," which is simply an intensification of the root "ogu." But although from a philological aspect this root is instructive, from a sociological standpoint, and as embracing within its scope the real human interest, we will find that "ani" or "ala," earth, and "issi," head, are even more comprehensive, not independently or directly, however, but in mutual or outside combination. Taking the former to commence with, we obtain in "issi-ani" the most primitive and natural form of homage, the literal meaning of which is head to earth.

In the words "kpo-issi-ani," adore, and "akpo-issi-ani," adorer, composed, as each of them is, of three different words, the literal meaning of which is "kpo," call or steer, "issi," head, "ani," ground, *i.e.* steer or guide the head to the ground; or by connecting "kpa," cause, and "akpam," cause to adhere, with "kpo," it is possible to conceive how "ikwe-issi-ani," meaning allegiance, as being an outcome of personal adoration, resulted first in reverence and homage, then culminated in an allegiance that was sacred because it was personal and ancestral.

But the primary and essential sense of the allegiance that is here implied, similar or rather identical, as it is, to that of the earth homage, is also a matter that is deserving of the deepest and most critical scrutiny. For without a clear and tenacious grasp of the psychology of this significant philosophy, it is impossible to follow up the otherwise luminous associations and connections of natural religion that lead up from the bowels of the personified earth through the spirit personalities of departed ancestors, right into the very heart, as it were, of the personified sky. So here in "igwe," the Ibo word for the sky, there is no difficulty whatever in tracing the primitive "ke," create, "igwe" or "ikwe" being synonymous with "gwe" and "kwe," just as "kwe" is with "ke." And as the sky spirit appeared to these ancient philosophers as the generator or fertiliser and first father god, it was from his name that "ke" came to mean create, that is "ka," ripe; and so also "ka" implied superior and talk, for to them he was equally the talker and the maker; while it is significant that "ga," which may have been confounded with "ka," means succeed.



In connection with the word "kwe," it is here necessary to examine the two words "kweme," can or able, and "kwesiri," which varies in its meanings. For while in the former term there is a decided possibility of tracing its development to the belief in the ability of the creative principle to create or operate in any direction, so in the latter word, which as first of all meaning to be fit, developed next into a something suitable, and then came to imply equal. It is also easy to see that the law of "lex talionis" is, as has been previously pointed out, nothing but the evolution of those basic principles which constitute all that is religious, moral, and equitable in them, as in all human beings.

So, too, although not actually derived from the same root, it is all the same advisable to investigate the words "kpere," pray, and "ekpere," prayer, connected as they are in spirit and in principle to this law of equilibrium. For as prayer with these natives is nothing but a petition addressed to the ancestral gods, invariably with regard to material and personal prosperity,—a fact which is confirmed in every way by their practices,—so we find that "kpere," pray, has been developed from "kpe," steer, and connected it may be with "kpa," cause, both words clearly indicating its drift as being unmistakably one of control and causation. So, too, "beku," which means implore, and "bu-ikpere" or "sekpuru," worship, consists of nothing but an imploring or invocation, accompanied by the inevitable dance and feast; in other words, a necessary performance of legitimate and essential ancestral duties, as a return for favours given and favours expected.

Returning for a moment to the contemplation of the sky, we find that "igwe" or "igwe-otsa" means clouds, and as further interpreted by myriads, also iron, it is singularly suggestive of the stars that appear in the sky, as well as of Jove's mighty thunderbolts. Transferring our attention once more from heaven to earth, *i.e.* to the word "àni" or "ala," it is essential that we should get to understand why in one direction it should be connected with fornication and iniquity, and in another with such words as stoop, "huri-ala," and solicitous, "ba-kiri-ani." For as the earth was considered sacred and revered accordingly, so any offence committed against her—including, of course, that of fornication, which was doubly personal, embracing as it did the ancestral or spiritual—was equivalent to an offence committed against the person, and in this deeply personal sense it was regarded in the light of an iniquity or wickedness. But this latter word is also represented by "aroro-àla," in addition to "ndso," evil, and "nmefie," which likewise implies transgression; and it is obvious that "aroro" is derived from, or at least connected with, "ero" or "iro," enmity or malice, so that the iniquity in question was considered to be aggravated



by wilfulness or premeditation, while "nmefie," *i.e.* me, blood, and "efe," dislocating, associated as it is with the same idea of blood dislocation or pollution, that has already been referred to in connection with the word "nmerua" or "merua," spoil and defile, is doubly so an unjustifiable transgression.

This will be all the better understood when we grasp the fact that this same word also, in its more primitive form, "aro-àla," means an atrocity. Further, that there is no specific word for chastity, which is described as "adiro-aróro-ala," *i.e.* the absence or non-existence of defilement—"adiro" being equivalent to "odiro," which meaning, as it does, it is not, when added to another word negatives it.

It is impossible, therefore, except hypothetically, to arrive at the associations which must formerly have existed between such words as "ororo," assortment; "iroro," contemplation or consideration; feast, "oriri"; cord, "iriri"; continue, "diriri"; acquit, "iri" or "aro"; acquittal, "iri-aro," and hope, "orika." But a contemplation of the links that may possibly have at one time existed between them, if it does nothing else, leads us at least to reflect not alone on the extreme paucity of the symbols from which these natural observers drew their inspirations, but more particularly on the fact that their philosophy—meagre and merely symbolical or verbal as it was—was their religion, and their religion was the natural adoration and allegiance of the personal, *i.e.* of their fathers in the spirit. And as in their belief the subsistence of the latter was absolutely essential to their own maintenance, and as this again was entirely a question of sacrifice—in other words, a feast on the substance and spirit of the offering—it was also a question of contemplation and consideration, equally so of hope, the hope of ancestral favours, the continuance of which formed the sum and substance of their daily prayers or invocations. But as the balance was never even, personal or land pollution, as is naturally to be expected, was a frequent offence, therefore all the more so a matter for further reflection as well as of annoyance. But although these associations are difficult to appreciate, it is an easy matter to see why "diriri," as the joining or connecting together of ideas or events, just as in "iriri," cord, strands of fibre are twisted into one length, came to mean continue.

To return, however, to this root "aro." That it was, as previously remarked, associated with "ero" or "iro," malice and enmity, and that this again is derived from the same primitive as "nro," pain, is tolerably certain. For physical pain, equally with mental dejection, as in their opinion all disease, is nothing but the material effect produced by a spiritual cause, *i.e.* by the action of spirits. So that looking at the matter from this natural aspect,

it is perhaps possible to connect it with the "ara" of "pu-ara," mad.

To attempt, however, to trace to its source either of the words "na" or "pu-ara," both implying madness, is, to say the least of it, a baffling task. That the former word must have been in some way connected with the words "nna" or "nwe" in an animistic sense, as being a spirit that is above, about, and around—everywhere, in fact—is an inference to some extent justified by the fact that madness is now regarded as possession by a spirit invariably evil, therefore inimical, and frequently, too, of the same household.

On the same natural principle, land, as being personal to or the property of the people living upon it, is regarded and respected in the same personal light, so that any act which is perpetrated against the constituted authority of the patriarch, or thing, is at one and the same time a crime against the land. Thus "aghara-ala," which now means anarchy, originally meant a disturbance or unsettlement of the people of a certain locality, from "aghara," confusion, and "ala," land or country; but the real force of this interpretation is much more explicitly grasped when we trace the former word to its root, "gha" or "hara," either of which signify leave or forsake—for originally an act of this nature was without doubt regarded as an unpardonable impiety, judging so alone from the present attitude of the natives towards land and all personal property. Indeed, this is to some extent seen in the meaning of the word "onye-aghara," an impertinent or impudent fellow, or literally, one who makes for confusion and disturbance. Yet as showing the intense polarity of human nature even in its most primitive aspect, the word "baghara" now represents forgive. Going in the other direction, it is palpable that as an outcome of the reverence due to the earth, it must at some remote period have been customary, more so when the adoration of this great element, as the goddess mother, was in full swing, as on a smaller scale this is now carried on through the departmental deities, in thanking her for past to solicit her for future favours, so that the development of the words stoop and solicit, from "ani" or "ala," is in no wise a circumstance that ought to surprise us. Yet although it has no direct bearing on the question that has been more immediately under discussion, as merely a side issue it is interesting to note how the word "di" or "onu-ani," as a charge on the land which, as producing naturally, and without any visible labour or trouble,—the operation as one with the creative being looked on as spiritual,—came eventually to signify cheap.

But we have not yet done with "issi." For while "elu-issi," literally head to sky, denotes what is over or above the head, and in this way the top of the head,—similarly as the word watch, *i.e.* to

keep a look-out, is "anya-anwu," meaning eye to sun,—or as "inya-issi," eye to head, implies to vaunt or brag, and "nya-issi," boast, "buru-issi," on the contrary, which in its naked simplicity meant bear or carry head, has in some inconceivable way changed its meaning to aforesaid, unless we see in its development a process of mental calculation, which reckoned up the past by means of the names of deceased heads of houses. Compounded with "obi," which has various interpretations, abode in this case being the most suitable, "issi-obi" is indicative of courage, while "adsi-issi," literally principal or head dust, represents a chief of some rank—another justification, if this were needed, of their attachment to the earth, and of the reverence that is reposed in it through the personalities of chiefs and patriarchs.

There still remain for investigation quite a number of words, into the psychology of which inquiry is possible, but in the first place enough has been done in this direction, more specifically with regard to quality—the greater and more important of them having been examined; and in the second place, an equally important moiety, from a sociological standpoint more particularly, awaits us in the analysis of names and proverbs. In addition, however, to these cogent reasons, the fact that those leading and essential principles which, as has already been substantiated in Part III., are embodied in their personal and religious practices, have been sufficiently, if not copiously illustrated, ought in itself to answer the purpose; nay, more than this, to be a further incentive to the reader to continue an investigation which, so far, has succeeded in throwing a light upon the subject, that is as luminous as it is ominous when compared with the realities of their present existence. All the more so when we consider that this existence has in no radical or religious sense changed from that which witnessed the birth and development of these primitive symbol-words.

Under these circumstances, it is not possible to conclude this chapter without once more calling attention to the literal simplicity of this natural word construction. For the fact that so many words have been formed from so few roots not only demonstrates the simplicity of their constructive methods, in other words the process of evolution, but also the want, in the person of these thought-leaders, not so much of originality as the possession of an inherent tendency to conserve and stick to the same familiar symbol and idea.

## APPENDIX C

### THE FURTHER MENTALITY AND THE DEEPER HUMANITY OF NAMES

To every name itself is attached a significance of expression and an intensity of human emotions the depths of which it is quite impossible for us to sound, much less to fathom. For not only is this attachment a living personal memory, but it is a record of persons and events that have been associated and connected with it. So that, from a natural standpoint, there is more in a name,—more joy and more sorrow, more pathos and more passion, more tragedy and more comedy, more humanity and inhumanity than it is possible for the civilised unit to realise. Because, in fact, there is centred in a name all the philosophy—*i.e.* all the love and tenderness, all the hate and scorn, all the jest and satire, all the hopes, aspirations, and ambitions that people such as these are capable of. For these names are but the pages, and the proverbs are the chapters, in the life-history of every house; more than this, they are the diary or daily record, either of its progress and development or of its deterioration and downfall. And just as we who are civilised write our inmost thoughts and feelings into books, these human beings, whose nature is no different from our own, have utilised the flesh and the blood of their own children and of their slaves, so that they might leave behind them an everlasting and imperishable record of their life and death struggles.

For from beginning to end of the whole question, not only of their philosophy but of their entire sociology, we are confronted with the personal. And as we saw in Appendix B that their religion and their gods were a purely personal and family matter, that concerned the wellbeing and prosperity of the household, so in these names we see all the more clearly and forcibly how, as being one and the same with their ancestors, they are one and the same with their deities, with this difference, that the latter, as they suppose, preside and rule over them through the medium of the former. But as this personal connection between the people



on the one side and their gods on the other is a feature that is pre-eminent, and as it appears to them inevitable, it is essential for the reader to take especial notice of it. For he will see, and this early conception of the matter will all the better enable him to appreciate, how it is that the human and the spiritual, closely blended together as they are, have not simply become inseparable, but that the latter is merely the continuity, as it is also the controlling factor, of the former.

Having prepared the ground and defined the course of their religion, as it is marked out through a maze of words by associations and precedents that are linked together in one connected chain of custom, we will now attempt to continue along this track of names, which in the end, it is hoped, will become as well defined and beaten as that which has brought us so well and so far.

With a plethora of names such as are at our service, the difficulty, as it has all along been, is to know where and how to commence. The fact, however, that the essential principle of the entire—*i.e.* the human and the spiritual—fabric is, according to native ideas, based, as we have seen, on the personal and social element, at once simplifies the matter. So, taking the family or social unit to start with, the custom which under normal conditions obtains among all these Southern Nigerian tribes is to call their children by names that are significant of the order in which they have been born—*i.e.* the order of succession and of their significance in the household. Thus among the Ibani, for example, the first-born is named "Ogbulu," and the first daughter, "Ogbolo"; the second son, "Sunju," the second daughter, "Osunju"; the third son, "Dappa," and the third daughter, "Ndappa"; and so on. But in the event of the death of the first-born, the second son when born is called "Di-ibo," or reborn, signifying that in their belief the first son has been reborn. Should it happen, however, that several children belonging to the same parents die in succession, the name of "Kia," meaning countless, is bestowed on the last arrival, in the form of a feeble reminder, or rather reflection, regarding the remissness or even good faith of the ancestral deities. In the same way, among the Ibo the name "N'wa M'muo," child of spirit, is given to the last infant of a woman who has had either several successive miscarriages or whose children have died in early infancy; and the meaning here intended is also an indication of doubt and uncertainty with reference to its future, dependent as this is on the variable and revengeful attitude of spirits in general, but of those who are inimical in particular.

The position of the first-born son, as has more than once been pointed out, is unique, sacred and sacerdotal, by the natural



law of primogeniture. Similarly, the eldest daughter occupies a lesser but also important position in the household, which entitles her to certain rights and privileges; but, except for this, it is always in the male branch that the interest of the family centres. So when a son is born in Bonny, among people of Ibo origin, and he happens to be a fine infant, the choice and affectionate name of "Nwa diuto" is conferred on him. For, meaning, as it literally does, sweet son, *i.e.* it is sweet or good to bear a son, it is, as it were, a poem and an epigram that conveys much in little—much joy, and mirth, and warmth of feeling, but, above all, a keen appreciation of a gift so appropriate and so godly. When, however, circumstances have been hard, cruel, and altogether unfortunate, and only one child is left in a family, the Ibo, whether it be a son or a daughter, specially select for it the equally poetical and epigrammatical appellation of "Nwa ahuna ayan"—love child, or child of love.

But if the name "Nwa ahuna ayan" is suggestive of so much poetry and pathos, in a name such as "Nwa-ka-ire,"—a son surpasses everything,—we discover, so to speak, an exultant strain, if not outburst of joy, and a sonorous pæan of unstinted praise thrown to the gods in a reckless frenzy and ecstasy of delight, an outpouring of the patriarchal feelings, and an acknowledgment of the tardy but all the more acceptable beneficence of the household deities. To grasp thoroughly the underlying motive of this frenzied extravagance, it will be as well for the reader to study the legend that is connected with this patronymic. It appears that a long time ago there was a chief called "Tsuku-Debai,"—the man in God's care,—living in the Ibo interior, who was wealthy and powerful in every direction, endowed as he was with wives, slaves, land, and goods of every description, but wanting in one great and important essential, and that was a son. So that in spite of his wealth and prosperity his heart was sad and heavy within him. For the Supreme Father, he, the begetter of all things in the sky and earth, had forgotten and overlooked him, and so the spirit fathers in their turn had neglected and forsaken the house of which he was the earthly head and representative. Thus it was that the desire of his heart was as yet unfulfilled, and the continuity of his household trembled in the balance, which threatened not only to be uneven, but to upset and altogether collapse. It was true that he had daughters, but what were a score or so of daughters as compared to one son!

Disturbed in mind and distressed in heart, Tsuku-Debai, having exhausted all the arts and medicines of the local Dibias, had applied to doctors and diviners of other localities with a more than local reputation, to work the oracle for him, but in vain, for

the medicines of the former and the magic arts and divinations of the latter were alike useless; until at length, penetrating the thick mists of the surrounding spirit world, there came to him, like a ray of sunshine through a little chink, the thought that the gods of others were nothing but crafty leeches who had sucked the blood of his worldly substance almost dry. Thereupon, like the Jewish potentate of old, on whom the wisdom of others has been foisted, Tsuku-Debai suddenly realised that life was vanity and vexation of spirit, and that there were no gods like his own gods. So, resigning himself to an attitude of silent despair, he once more threw himself, through the mediation of his household divinities, upon the clemency of the Supreme God. And in the much-hoped-for end, which had been so long coming, his domestic virtue was finally rewarded. For just as the serpent-gliding lightning flashes and falls from the heights above right into the very midst of the forest, the day came when the Mighty One at last remembered him, and one of his wives brought forth a son and a reproducer of his own personality. Then so great and overpowering was the joy of this man, who at his own birth had been placed in the care and dedicated to the service of God by his father, that in the overflowing fulness of his heart he called his son "Nwa-ka-iri." Because he, like his father before him, wanted to express as well as to record those thoughts which were not only deepest but uppermost in his mind, to the effect that no matter how rich and powerful a man may be, without a son to transmit and so perpetuate his own and the ancestral personality, he is worthless and useless—that is, there is no further utility for him or his branch of the family, because after death his name can no longer be held in remembrance. In addition to this, because there is further implied in this the liability of disembodiment after death, which at once places the spirit of the sonless person outside the ancestral pale and makes of it an outcast—the mere anticipation of which is to these natives a terror in itself.

It is in fact with these natives, as it is with Asiatics, who consider male children to be the light, the glory, and the splendour of their families; so even among the poorest and humblest perpetuation of the parent stock and the transmission of the material embodiment, without which there can be no spiritual continuity or perpetuity, is a sacred duty, which they feel they owe as much to the human as to the spiritual branch of the household. And in nothing, not even in their customs, can we grasp this natural and ancestral conception so plainly as in these names, which invoke, promise, threaten, praise, revile, satirise, and sympathise, that in fact express and demonstrate all that is human—*i.e.* all that is best and worst in them.

In the name "Ngara mara" we must have recourse to, not so much a fable as a parable, before we can grasp the force and intensity of all that is meant to be conveyed. A man, who was nameless, once upon a time married a certain woman. After they had lived together for some years without the latter bearing him any children, he divorced her, and reclaimed the marriage expenses from her family, with which he took unto himself another woman. But alas for him, as matters turned out—the second wife also proved to be barren, while his former spouse, who had remarried, had presented her husband with some very fine children. A calamity—for sterility is regarded as calamitous, and due either to the disfavour of the gods or to the machinations of evil and antagonistic spirits—such as this was too much for this childless being. Losing his head, and with it his wits, he made overtures to the woman whom he had turned out of his house to induce her to return to him, but to no purpose, for they were promptly and indignantly rejected. Disgusted but not disheartened, the nameless one promptly bought a female slave, and called her "Ngara mara," a name which not only asks but begs a question, implying, as it does, an answer to the effect that had I only known then what I know now, that my second wife that was to be was unfruitful, I would never have removed my first—a sentiment that does not require either further elucidation or comment, indicating, as it does, the entirely human or personal aspect of a matter which, to these natives, is also one of a hereafter.

Turning aside from this uxorious aspect of the question, and continuing our analysis in another direction, in the Ibo name "Onwu-mere," literally the act of death, or what death has done for me, it is at once possible to picture the advent of a child into a household during a time when all is woe and desolation, because of some grievous calamity that has fallen on it.

To better understand the sarcasm which is here implied, let us examine the name "Onwu-che-kwa," which means, Death, wait a moment. It is once more an easy matter to conjure up the very vivid impress of a scene that is being daily enacted amid the depressing gloom of a cloud-covered sky and a forest environment, when, sitting in solemn conclave under the grateful shade and protection of their ancestral gods, and of some widespread, majestic cotton tree, the patriarch and elders of the family are collected together to discuss events. Face to face with the painful and disheartening fact that all the children who were born previous to the arrival of this one had been snatched away from them, and apart from the inevitable sacrifice and offerings which are duly offered, there is addressed in this name a petition to the spirit of death, which not only begs him to desist, but which

implores him to stay his dread hand and spare this offspring, so that it may live and perpetuate the name and substance of the house.

Passing on to yet another locality, we come across a family which is in a still greater depth of despair and dejection. Robbed and crushed by the stronger hands of their neighbours, and equally so, beaten on to their very knees by the neglect of their domestic deities and the bitter malevolence of hungry demons, they give vent to no heartrending cries or wailing lamentations; but when a son is born to them they grovel and abase themselves in the very dust, as they call it "Onwu-biko,"—Death, pardon, and have mercy. For the conferring of a name upon a child is in no sense a mere social or religious formality, nor is it only an ordinary petition, but an act which, from every native point of view, is a perpetual landmark in the history of the house. Because the longer the child lives the more convincing and substantial is the evidence that their petition has at length succeeded in its object, or *vice versa*, when it dies, that it has entirely failed. It is, however, in no sense surprising that with a people so literal as these natives are, the practice of conferring names should not alone correspond, but be connected with the current course of events that are taking place. Indeed, it needs but a little reflection on this point to arrive at such a decision, because, with no means at their disposal of recording either their thoughts or their actions, it is only reasonable that they should select this natural way of doing it. It is but a reversion to the personal, which is ever present, because inevitable, in addition to the fact that this safety-valve, out of which the excess of personal joy or sorrow is bound to escape, is, with the exception of their customs and practices, the sole means which is at their disposal of expressing their mental emotions, *i.e.* their philosophy.

Let me conduct the reader to either Brass or Bonny, with the object of meeting, as we are bound to do, a man or a woman called "Olali" or "Olalibo," or, as it is spelt in the latter place, "Alali." A soft and euphonious name such as this, meaning, as it does, a son or a daughter of joy, is at once a guarantee that the individual in question was born on some occasion of a great feast, or on a day of general rejoicing throughout the tribe or community. Before inquiring into his antecedents, it is a foregone conclusion that the occasion in question had been proclaimed as a universal holiday because of an enemy vanquished or a victory gained; or possibly, because some renowned hunter belonging to the community had slain a mighty beast, such as an elephant or a hippopotamus. Or yet again, in more modern times, because of the advent of a European trading vessel—an event that was held



in such high honour among these coast tribes that it entailed a thanksgiving offering to the gods in the form of a human sacrifice. And inquiry merely confirms anticipation, besides, of course, giving all the details in connection with the case.

Pursuing our investigations in a gig canoe belonging to one of the leading chiefs of Ibani, the captain or steersman, on being interrogated, answers that he is named "Tamunoilunimi,"—God's good will. This name is given either to free-borns or slaves, of both sexes, when born at a time of great and unusual prosperity.

Continuing our inquiries among the crew at random, the boy who is paddling on our right turns out to be "Soto," a son, who has been provided by the same Supreme God. Sitting in front of him is "Karibi," who came to his parents disguised in the substantial form of a blessing, from the same sublime source; while behind, reclining in the well of the canoe, on some hard boards softened only by a thin country mat, is a daughter of the owner himself, rejoicing in the mellow and melodious cadence of "Soba," a name which, in addition to proving her divine origin, demonstrates, as do the other names which have been mentioned, that fate, in the person of the ancestral and supreme god, has dealt not only kindly, but to some worldly purpose, with this particular household.

On landing at one of the Ibani farms, between the Bonny and Andoni rivers, when we are conducted to the house by a lugubrious looking creature, it is not in the least surprising to know that his name is "Bilibilibo,"—a son who has come to the house during a time of trouble and sorrow. More than this, as if to show that his name was well deserved and appropriate, and further, as a practical proof that the sorrow had remained with him, the dilapidated condition of the premises and its surroundings tells its own tale of ruin and poverty even more eloquently than the mere name, suggestive though it is. It would, however, baffle even the divining powers of the shrewdest and most calculating thought-reader of the present day to guess that the weakly-looking youth in attendance on the woebegone host is "Orumbo,"—a war-man. But such is the fact, the accident of birth, or, as they deem it, the act of God, having coincided with a period during which their country was at war. The name given to a child often has relation to the time or place of its birth, or, in the case of a slave, of his or her acquisition; for example, a child called "Bush" or "Canoe" indicates that it was born underneath the one or inside the other.

It is not in the least surprising, therefore, to ascertain that among the crowd of people which is assembled at Nembe are men and women who, as having been ushered into this existence during the



night, are called "Ombo," "Omnombo," and "Noina," "Nointa," or "Noinoin"; and others who, because they were born at flood-tide or high-water, bear the names of "Seria," "Seri," and "Seriba," "Kalaseri" and "Osere"; while those whose fate ordained that they should make their appearance on this earthly scene when the tide was ebbing, or at low-water, go through life bearing the name of "Omo," or ebb-tide.

Looking round us, there are, again, others who have come into being either in the bush or mangrove swamps, and who, in consequence, carry about their persons the absolutely ineffaceable title of "Piri," "Piriba," and "Bowu," which marks them down, as it does one and all whose fortunes have been similarly erratic, as persons dedicated to those spirits of forest or water under whose special and specific care they have been brought forth. But our list is by no means exhausted. So we also find that if during the pregnancy of a woman her husband dies, the child when born, if a male, is called "Daofa," or if a female, "Daerigha," which implies that it has never seen its father. But if, while she is in such condition, her husband is away in foreign or distant parts, and her confinement proves to be identical with his return, a son in such case is named "Daokuru," and a daughter "Ikoru" or "Dakuru," meaning that it has waited for its father to be born. In the event, however, of a woman bearing twins, regarded, as this is, as an unnatural affliction, the second arrival is thrown into the bush alive, while the first is retained and named "Isele," if a boy, and if a girl, "Selai," *i.e.* selected. But as if to show to what an excess this habit can be carried, besides affording us an excellent illustration of the spleen and sarcasm these people are capable of, when it happens that a woman upon whom the stigma of sterility has been thrown by spiteful and more fortunate neighbours, at last gives birth to an infant, it is at once christened, according to its sex, either "Digha" or "Dighabo," *i.e.* barren.

Leaving Brass, and going inland again, in the philosophic cognomen of "Ndu-wuisi" we are confronted with an appellation which is used among the Ibo in the case of a chief or head of a house who has been delivered from some great and grievous sickness or affliction, and who at the same time has either purchased a slave or has had a son presented to him by one of his wives. Of a somewhat similar nature to this is the name "Inoma-Ihia,"—it is useless to cheat; which, bestowed as it is on a slave purchased by a man who has suffered oppression at the hands of one richer and stronger than himself, on the occasion of some misfortune occurring to his oppressor, is descriptive of an incident which is, unfortunately, common enough in the social life of these natives.

It is related of a free-born, who, although of an independent

position, was a man of only very limited means, that he bought a slave, who by his own active intelligence and exertions rose to the rank of chief in the community to which his master belonged. Arrived at a position so honourable, this man purchased for himself a slave, "Buo," *i.e.* literally feet, which thus released him from attendance on his owner, to whom he gave the name of "Iri Ibugeea," which, as implying that, you are not fit to be my master, was, to say the least of it, equal to the snub direct. For a name so full of undisguised contempt as this is more than equivalent to a blow on the face. But poor and unambitious though he was, this was too much for the free-born, his master, who was a man of spirit, and as it happened that about this time his favourite wife presented him with a fine infant, he called its name "Isiri-sihia"; this signifying, you cannot wash it out, or, in other words, once my slave always my slave, was a retort that was none the less courteous because it was true, for manumission,<sup>1</sup> like non-alienation of land, is practically impossible and unattainable.

The personal, as an element which enters in some shape or form into practically every name, and the association that exists between the people and their gods, who, although presumably spiritual are virtually personal, has more than once been called attention to. To accentuate this fact, however, a little more from this specific direction, it will be necessary to examine a few more names. For it is desirable that the reader should understand, as I myself do, after a very searching investigation, such as I have made, into thousands of names belonging to the various tribes, that no matter in what direction we look, this dual element is always present.

Thus "Da opunýe," big father, is a patronymic that, although it is utilised for either sex, is usually conferred on the male, being, as it is, essentially patriarchal in its scope and potentialities. Given as a rule to a slave who has been redeemed by a free-born or domestic of a house, with the help of his master, as well as in the redemption by a chief of a slave, whom he has presented to either a son or a daughter, the hidden significance of its meaning is, that a man must not trifle with his master, because the master of a house is, in the eyes of the gods, a great and important being, the father,—and as possessor of all that is in it, including souls and bodies, the mother,—and not only the link between the spiritual and human households, but the selected representative of the latter, who is responsible to the former for the discipline and veneration that is their due.

The cognomen "Wari N'gerebo Mea,"—a house does not belong to one man alone, implies that a house is divided against itself, and consists of several adult children, who are on bad terms with each

other, and the head of which, having departed to the spirit regions, has consigned its welfare to the eldest son, who is universally unpopular. If, therefore, under circumstances such as this, it should happen that a child of either sex is born to one of the younger members, this name is adopted, as a plain and unmistakable caution to the newly appointed head, in defiance of all ancestral precedent. For although even these coast natives are in their hearts still true to the patriarchal system, they have certainly imbibed the principles of socialism, and further, also acknowledge, as we have seen, the inevitable principle of equilibrium. So that in the event of the head of a house proving himself to be unworthy of his great trust, and incapable of ruling it, he is at once deposed by a meeting of all the elders, and the member who in the opinion of the majority is considered most eligible is elected to replace him.

The following need no comment: commencing with the Ibana, we have "Father is great," "Well done, father," "Father's right hand," "Father's gift," "The child who loves a father's house," "Fatherless child," "Whatever a father says," or "has said," "The goodness of God," "No one has seen God," "People's words are not God's," "God, not man, is my creator"—a name, I may remark, that is in every sense suggestive, if not indicative, of that animistic principle of creation which, as I pointed out in Appendix B, is one of the essential beliefs on which their creed is based, and in this way a light, which shows clearly the oneness of the Creator with the created, and therefore the inseparability of the spiritual from the human.

Passing on to Brass, we find that "God is greater than deities," that "Everything was ordained by God," that "There is no one strong with God," that "No one can reject the acts of God," that "No one knows the ways of God," and that "There is not a man whom God does not bless"; but as an offset to this, "There is no one who will not do me evil." Further, that "Breeding is for the benefit of the earth," that "deception" and "division" are inevitable elements, and that "There is no man who will live for ever."

Continuing with Ibo, it is recognised that "The Creator does not cancel," but that "he protects," "saves," and "does exceedingly well." So these people "give God the preference," and "claim His protection." Yet it is possible "For a man to be calumniated by the Creator himself." But while in one direction certain names affirm that "God is the way," "Is the cause of all fame," "Has the life," "Has the increase," and that it is "His hand that guides," another name asks, "Is there indeed a Creator?" and others again express the wish that "God may avenge," and "think." Descend-

ing from heaven to earth,—“The land does well,” “The land protects,” therefore it is invited to “help” and to “judge,” also to “spare” and to “commend.” Then it is acknowledged that “The spirits surpass all war,” that “No eye can see spirit,” that “The land of spirits is very far,” “The spirit does exceedingly well,” “Protection is requested from the spirit against foul means,” while the power of “Death that has conquered” and from which “there is no rescue” and “no escape” is likewise admitted. So also is the power of the mysterious eye,—“May I not be killed by the eyes,” “The eye accuses the brave of theft,” or, as seen in the name “Aya Oku,” which, although it means a brave man is literally a man who has fire in his eyes, *i.e.* an impulsive, impetuous man, and is a name given, in addition to his own, to a man who is of a fiery and energetic disposition. Then, again, we get in another name a pathetic if not piteous appeal, made by the person, that “His name and personality be not lost,” that “There may be no scarcity of men with him,” that “He may have only sons,” that “His own may live for ever.” For a “Father is the sustainer of strength,” “A child is the way,” “A son the sovereign lord,” “Children are beautiful ones” and “a fortune.” Because “In a multitude is strength and good”; although it is also recognised “That a multitude is a cause of malice.” But in the midst of it all, and in spite of the fact that “life is most important,” and that “life surpasses,” as it also is “the question,” “Household wrath” prevails simply because “man is more wrathful than God.” Recognising, too, that “When a thing is done its effect remains,” that “The world is a mystery to them,” and that “Some things are found unexpectedly,” “They do not regard words,” yet “Calumniate after due consideration.”

Going outside the limit of Southern Nigeria into the Yoruba country, merely for two luminous examples, we get in “Abeokuta”—the name of the town in the Lagos hinterland—the meaning “Under the stone,” which as an emblem of their ancestral deity was worshipped by its people under the designation of “the Builder”; and in “Awujale,” which was the title of the kings of “Jebu,” we have “Lord of the soil” and “Supreme head of all other kings,” it being the custom for the head of every small community in this country, as in the Delta, to call himself a king.

This habit of coining or creating names to meet the exigencies and to mark the events of the daily life struggle, which as an outcome of their literal nature has developed into an idiosyncrasy, is not only confined to themselves, but used freely towards all outsiders or foreigners with whom they are brought into contact, either socially, politically, commercially, or by any other means.

Thus an administrative officer or a trader who in his dealings



with the people has had a strong or a tight hand over them, is designated "Aka-ike," which means, literally, a man with strength, or a strong man. A military officer who has been engaged in punitive expeditions at once becomes "Ozumbah," a fighter or breaker of towns. Any one wearing eye-glasses or spectacles is "Anya ngbegwe ugbe,"—the man with the glass eyes; while an individual who has heavy or prominent cheek-bones assumes to them the aspect of a "cat-fish," *i.e.* with big jaws. Further, it is noticeable that in the bestowal of these names they evince at times a decided sense or appreciation of humour, of the dry or quizzical description, as is evident from the following specimens, "Oganah," meaning presents have ceased,—a name that is given to a trader who, in order to secure the custom of the natives of a certain locality, commences by distributing presents indiscriminately amongst them, but who ceases to do so once he has gained his object. "Osisi-omma,"—the good gun; "Osisi," literally a tree or a stick, is also used to denote a gun, as being in shape and size somewhat like the latter; and this name was in one instance that I know conferred on a well-known European agent, of the name of Gunn, who was on excellent terms with the natives.





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